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# General Assembly

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*Official Records*

**73**rd plenary meeting
Tuesday, 28 November 2000, 10 a.m.
New York

*President:* Mr. Holkeri ..... (Finland)

*The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.*

**Agenda item 47**

**Assistance in mine action**

**Report of the Secretary-General** (A/55/542)

**Draft resolution** (A/55/L.44/Rev.1)

**The President**: Before giving the floor to the first speaker, I should like to inform members that, in a letter dated 6 October 2000 addressed to the President of the General Assembly, the Permanent Representative of Turkey to the United Nations, in his capacity as Chairman of the Group of Western European and other States for the month of October, requests that the General Assembly hear in plenary meeting a statement by the observer of Switzerland in the debate on agenda item 47.

In view of the importance attached to the issue under discussion, it is proposed that the General Assembly should take a decision on that request.

If there is no objection to the proposal, may I take it that the General Assembly decides to hear a statement by the observer of Switzerland in the debate on this item?

*It was so decided.*

**The President**: I call on the representative of France, who will introduce draft resolution A/55/L.44/Rev.1.

**Mr. Le Caruyer de Beauvais** (France) (*spoke in French*): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the countries of the European Union. The Central and Eastern European countries associated with the European Union — Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia — and the associated countries Cyprus and Malta, as well as Iceland, a European Free Trade Association country that is a member of the European Economic Area.

This agenda item, "Assistance in mine action", involves a scourge that continues, day after day, to claim innocent lives all over the world. The tragedy of anti-personnel mines,' which particularly affect the civilian populations of countries already suffering as a result of past or current armed conflict, continues unabated despite the efforts of the international community.

A large number of countries are, however, devoting substantial resources to mine action, such as mine-clearance programmes and landmine victim assistance operations. The amount spent on this effort in 1999 is estimated at more than $219 million. This is clearly not sufficient, however, to eliminate the unfortunately often irreversible effects of the use of this cowardly and cruel weapon. We must therefore continue the parallel diplomatic endeavour to convince an ever-growing number of countries to join our fight.

The focus today should be on the responsibility of those who are still using these mines that kill and mutilate every day. The international community must

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unremittingly insist that they stop using these arms and encourage them to become involved in the fight against mines.

Substantial developments have taken place over the last year in combating anti-personnel landmines. The number of States parties to the Ottawa Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction continues to grow. The Meeting of States parties to this Convention, held last September in Geneva, adopted several reforms that, we hope, will further enhance the effectiveness of mine action.

The European Union hopes that this fight will be waged in every way that can lead to results. As a priority, it is pushing for the comprehensive and speedy implementation of the Ottawa Convention, which unquestionably set an international standard.

In particular we support the efforts of the non-governmental organizations, whose energy devoted to advancing the fight against mines is an essential factor of progress. The progress made thus far is largely due to that positive action. The Union also supports the central role played by the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, as the sole United Nations coordinator in the area of demining.

We cannot confine our efforts to policy statements. In the more concrete field of demining and victim assistance programmes, which since 1997 have been part of a common action adopted by the European Union, the European Commission and the member States spent more than 103 million euros on operational programmes last year, making the Union the largest contributor to these activities. Its aid will continue to be focused, on a priority basis, on those countries that have acceded to the Ottawa Convention. We call on those countries able to do so to follow us in this approach, and we welcome the efforts of all the other countries that support action in the fight against anti-personnel mines.

*Mr. Kafando (Burkina Faso), Vice-President, took the Chair.*

The Secretary-General's report again shows the scope of the task remaining to be accomplished if we are to continue and enhance the international community's efforts to combat the scourge of anti-personnel mines. We have pledged to win this fight rapidly, and it is in this spirit that the European Union is presenting a draft resolution this year devoted to mine action. We hope that it will receive very broad support and that it can be adopted by consensus, as such resolutions have been in years past.

**Mr. Kolby** (Norway): Landmines endanger the safety and well-being of individuals. They prevent people from exercising basic human rights such as the right to freedom of movement, the right to food and the right to health. They ruin the prospects for economic and social development. It is important to realize the humanitarian implications and the human dimension of the landmine problem. Humanitarian mine action must be people-centred. It is a question of the socio-economic recovery of war-torn communities, reconciliation, rehabilitation and reconstruction and, ultimately, human development.

The mine ban Convention has been invaluable in generating political momentum and providing a practical tool for the implementation of necessary action to deal with these challenges. According to the Landmine Monitor Report released by the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, there have been significant accomplishments in the field during the last year. The production of anti-personnel landmines has dropped dramatically, trade has practically come to a halt, millions of stockpiled anti-personnel landmines have been destroyed, a large area of mined ground has been demined, and more importantly, there has been a significant drop in the number of new mine victims in key countries.

But the unacceptable reality remains. Landmines continue to maim and kill innocent people. Landmines continue to pose a humanitarian and socio-economic problem of crisis proportions in too many countries. Certain Governments and rebel groups continue to use anti-personnel mines. We must therefore continue our efforts to universalize the mine ban Convention, to remove mines from the ground and to better address the needs of mine victims and mine-affected communities. We urge all those States that have not yet signed and ratified the Convention to do so.

The inter-sessional work programme under the Convention was established in order to facilitate and support the effective functioning of the Convention by creating an arena where Governments, international organizations, non-governmental organizations and academic institutions could meet to exchange

information, experiences and expertise and to mobilize resources to meet the needs in the field. The first year of this programme has been successful. It was encouraging to see the large number of participants from mine-affected areas and organizations working in the field. The active participation of the relevant United Nations agencies during this work programme is welcome.

Norway welcomes the report of the Secretary-General on assistance in mine action. We fully share the approach by which from an early stage mine action constitutes an integral part of the Organization's broader response to humanitarian crises, development and reconstruction efforts in the aftermath of conflict. Mine action cannot be perceived as a mere technical operation. In carrying out its role in mine action, the United Nations must acknowledge the implications of the problem and the urgency with which it has to be addressed. Most United Nations agencies, and in particular the United Nations Development Programme, the World Health Organization, the United Nations Children's Fund, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the World Food Programme, are in some way or another affected by the landmines problem on a daily basis through their various programmes. The need to deal effectively with landmines is increasingly also being realized in relation to peacekeeping operations. Greater coherence of efforts related to landmines within the United Nations is required. In this regard we support the continuous development and role of the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) as the focal point for mine action within the United Nations system, in close cooperation with the relevant agencies and programmes. We have contributed to the Voluntary Trust Fund for Assistance in Mine Action in support of the activities of UNMAS, and support efforts to put UNMAS on a more secure and stable financial footing.

We attach great importance to the revision of the international standards for humanitarian mine clearance and the development of international test procedures and guidelines for the use of mine-detection dogs and mechanical mine-clearance equipment. This will make mine-action programmes more effective and reduce accident rates and instances of incomplete clearance.

Predictable and stable funding is necessary to carry out mine-action programmes effectively. Norway has made a commitment of $120 million over a five-year period. Since 1998 more than $63 million has been allocated to mine-action projects in the field.

I would like to highlight a few points that Norway regards as being of particular relevance with regard to the implementation of mine-action programmes for next year.

The first is dissemination of information. We must continue to focus on improving the dissemination of relevant information. This includes enhancing transparency in mine-action funding; continuing the level I impact surveys; continuing the development and implementation of the Information Management System for Mine Action (IMSMA); promoting transparency in victims assistance programming and highlighting gaps; relevant guidelines for mine action; exchange of information regarding stockpile destruction; and encouraging States parties to the mine ban Convention to comply with the reporting obligations in accordance with article 7.

The second point regards coordination and flexibility. We should make better use of coordination mechanisms at the country and local levels. It is preferable that these mechanisms be headed by the national and local authorities. Coordination groups should include donors, international organizations and national and international non-governmental organizations, and the groups should work closely with mine-action coordination centres. The United Nations Mine Action Coordination Centre in Kosovo is a special case, but it has managed to encompass all major mine-action actors in one homogeneous structure. This experience should be shared with other mine-action programmes, bearing in mind that each situation is different.

The third point concerns implementation. We must continue to focus on progress in the field. The only sound goal is to further improve the figures on cleared land and to achieve a decline in the number of new landmine victims. To this end, we will continue to give priority to the full implementation of the mine ban Convention as the only international instrument for addressing mine action in a comprehensive way.

Finally, as regards victim assistance, existing structures within the health and social sectors should be reinforced and services and programmes aimed at mine victims should include all persons with disabilities, regardless of their cause. International organizations, donors and affected States should

examine further ways of enhancing mine-victim assistance, including socio-economic reintegration.

Norway looks forward to continuing its close collaboration with all relevant actors in meeting the challenges ahead.

**Mr. Livermore** (Canada): Canada wishes to express its appreciation to the Secretary-General for again providing such a comprehensive report on mine action. He has clearly highlighted the central issue before us: a global landmine problem posing challenges to us all. Equally, however, the report records impressive progress. We are grateful for the important role that the United Nations has played in achieving this progress.

In particular, Canada applauds the activities of the United Nations Mine Action Service in its important coordination role and in assessing the threat of landmines in numerous countries. We thank the United Nations Department for Disarmament Affairs for its work in supporting the Meetings of the States parties to the Ottawa Convention and in ensuring the effective transparency of reports submitted under article 7 of the Convention. We extend our appreciation to the United Nations Development Programme for its commitment to develop long-term capacity to manage and coordinate mine-action programmes. And we acknowledge and appreciate the important role of other United Nations agencies in addressing the insidious effects of landmines.

(*spoke in French*)

The Secretary-General has pointed out that landmines continue to cause tremendous suffering in many of the world's countries. We now know, however, that the novel measures that have been taken at the global level to address this problem are beginning to make a difference. The Ottawa Convention, which has now been officially accepted by a majority of the world's States, provides the international community a general framework for resolving the problem of landmines. In 1999 we celebrated the early entry into force of this important humanitarian instrument. This year, the partnership between Governments and civil society, which is essential, was strengthened in an effort to bring about the full implementation of the Convention.

(*spoke in English*)

This positive change is measurable. According to the International Campaign to Ban Landmine's Landmine Monitor Report, the number of producers of anti-personnel mines has dropped sharply in recent years, from 54 to 16. Today, of the 34 nations known to have exported anti-personnel mines in the past, all but one have at least made a formal statement that they have ceased to export. And more than 22 million stockpiled landmines have been destroyed in recent years by more than 50 nations.

In the most mine affected States in the world, more land is being freed from its deadly bondage and is being returned to productive use in communities that need it the most. While the inhumanity of antipersonnel landmines continues to claim new victims, we also know that casualty rates are declining — largely due to efforts to deliver risk-reducing mine awareness programmes. The guidelines for the delivery of mine awareness education developed by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) should go a long way to improving the effectiveness of this important aspect of mine action. We encourage both the implementation of these guidelines and regular evaluations to ensure the effectiveness of mine awareness education.

Landmine survivors and their communities are now receiving more and better services and support. We commend organizations like the Landmine Survivors Network for continuing to be at the forefront of delivering services to landmine victims and encouraging Governments to honour commitments to those whose lives have been changed as a result of the horrors of landmines.

More information and better ways of managing this information are leading to effective international priority-setting. Over the past year, an impressive amount of progress has been made in undertaking socio-economic impact surveys and assessment missions and in the deployment to date in 11 countries of the Information Management System for Mine Action, developed by the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining.

Possibly most important of all, increased efforts are being undertaken to ensure the sustainability of mine action efforts. In Canada, for example, the Canadian Landmine Foundation has been established to promote ongoing private sector involvement in addressing the global landmine problem. In other countries as well, resource mobilization efforts have

given the international community new tools to carry out vital programmes.

While heartened by this progress, we are reminded on a daily basis of the challenges that remain. We therefore recognize that achieving the promise of the Ottawa Convention means continuing the struggle against the production, use, stockpiling and transfer of these insidious weapons. We call upon those States that remain outside of the framework of the Ottawa Convention to join the majority of the world's States that have chosen to eradicate these weapons — in years, not decades.

We reiterate our call to those in a position to do so to provide technical and financial assistance to meet the enormous challenges of mine action and, where relevant, to integrate mine action efforts into development planning and programming. In a similar vein, we call upon the Security Council, when establishing mandates for peacekeeping operations, to express its readiness to consider articulating objectives for mine action in the context of its mandates.

To ensure continued progress towards the universalization of the Convention, we need to set practical deadlines. For example, with the Convention's third annual meeting, scheduled for Managua in September of next year, we should commit ourselves to the total destruction of stockpiled mines in the Americas by that time. We should strive to ensure that at least 120 States have ratified the Convention by that date, and we should ensure that all States parties are in compliance with the Convention's transparency reporting requirements.

To meet these targets, we need to identify and address impediments. For example, at a recent seminar on stockpile destruction held in Buenos Aires, delegations from signatory countries of the Americas agreed on a practical, achievable work plan. Experts will be coordinated to provide technical assistance on stockpile destruction in a timely manner. Assistance will be provided to help States in completing transparency reports.

While the meeting in Managua next year will rightly place a spotlight on the Americas, we are equally committed to making progress in other parts of the world. To maintain the momentum in Africa, for example, Canada, France and Mali are supporting a conference to take place in Bamako in February 2001. At that time, we hope to develop plans of action and means to undertake these actions in the African context. Similarly, Canada and Hungary will be sponsoring a regional seminar on the special problems of PFM landmine destruction to be held in Budapest in early February of next year. This will draw upon the special expertise of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and some of its member States.

*(spoke in French)*

We all share a common cause to find a common solution to the problem of landmines in the world. It is our joint responsibility to honour the memory of those who have lost their lives as a result of the use of these weapons, and it is our obligation to help the victims of landmines. We await the day when we can declare the world free of the scourge of mines.

*(spoke in English)*

In all of this work, the role of the United Nations, its agencies and its partner organizations is absolutely central. Through international cooperation, effectively coordinated and implemented, we can get the most out of limited resources. Through the leadership of the United Nations, we can move forward collectively, in keeping with common standards. Through the moral suasion of the United Nations, we can make the Ottawa Convention the standard of universality and comprehensiveness necessary for the total eradication of the scourge of landmines.

I applaud the leadership of the Organization. Canada looks forward to continued cooperation on mine action in the years ahead.

**Mr. Kobayashi** (Japan): In the last few years, the international community has made significant progress in the area of mine action, which includes mine clearance, mine awareness and victim assistance. It is clear that the Ottawa Convention, concluded in September 1997, was a turning point in facilitating mine action throughout the world. Japan is pleased that in only three years the number of States parties has now reached 107. Since Japan has encouraged countries that have not yet decided to participate in the Convention to do so, Japan would like to express its appreciation to all those countries which have become parties.

Japan would also like to express its deep appreciation to the relevant United Nations agencies, particularly the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS), which serves as a focal point of United

Nations mine action, as well as other relevant international organizations and non-governmental agencies that have taken initiatives in this area. The progress that has been made would have been impossible without their efforts and without their partnership.

Despite a growing list of accomplishments, we have to face the severe reality that landmines continue to harm human beings in post-conflict countries and that they are actually still being laid in some countries where conflicts continue. Considering the fact that the labour of removing landmines is much harder and more expensive than that of laying them, and that the physical and physiological damage to victims lasts such a long time, it is clear that we must continue to strengthen our efforts to counter this evil.

Not only do landmines cause human suffering and sometimes deprive people of their lives in the most random and brutal manner, but the existence of landmines in the ground is also a serious obstacle to people striving to rebuild their lives in post-conflict countries. We believe that the problems they cause have to be addressed as a threat to human life, survival and dignity. They are therefore a threat to human security, a concept that Japan is promoting and that Prime Minister Mori of Japan focused on in his speech at the Millennium Summit. It is from the standpoint of ensuring human security that Japan confirms its determination to tackle the problems posed by landmines in collaboration with international community.

At the Ottawa signing conference, in 1997, then Foreign Minister Obuchi proposed that we should establish a "zero victim" goal. That idea was incorporated into the Maputo Declaration, which was adopted at the First Meeting of the States Parties to the Ottawa Convention, which was last year. We reiterated the importance of that goal at the Second Meeting of the States Parties, which was held in Geneva last September. In order to achieve the "zero victim" goal, Japan announced that it would contribute ¥10 billion, or about $90 million, over the five-year period beginning in 1998. To achieve that target, Japan has continued to make financial contributions to the United Nations Voluntary Trust Fund for Assistance in Mine Action, which is managed by the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS), the Afghanistan project managed by United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and other international organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGO), together with bilateral assistance to mine-affected countries.

It is important to assist the capacity-building of mine-affected countries in order to enable them to play the primary role in mine action. For that reason, Japan has supported the establishment of mine action centres in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Cambodia, Thailand, Mozambique and Chad. Japan believes that a mine action centre can be a useful mechanism to encourage the initiatives of those mine-affected countries. Last September, Japan earmarked $500,000 of its contribution to the United Nations Voluntary Trust Fund for Assistance in Mine Action for a project to establish a mine action centre on the Ethiopia-Eritrea border.

Japan also believes that coordinating the activities of various bodies and setting standards for their activities are important, as a number of international organizations and NGOs have undertaken activities in mine action in the last few years. From this point of view, Japan expects UNMAS to serve as a focal point for the coordination of mine action. This year, Japan has contributed $400,000 to strengthen UNMAS.

Moreover, in order to promote partnership and the sharing of knowledge among NGOs, the development of an information management system should be encouraged. Japan supports the idea of the so-called Information Management System for Mine Action (IMSMA) project serving as a consolidated data base for mine action in mine-affected countries. Japan appreciates the cooperation between UNMAS and the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD) in elaborating this important tool. To facilitate the activities of NGOs in this area, the development of standards such as guidelines for mine action is critical. To that end, Japan made a financial contribution to the revision of the safety handbook on mine clearance, which will be published soon. Japan also made a contribution to the study of guidelines for the use of dogs in mine detection, which is an UNMAS-GICHD initiative. We did so because our past contributions towards the use of dogs produced good results in mine action in Croatia.

Since mine action in post-conflict countries usually starts with mine clearance, we have accumulated extensive experience and resources in that

area. But Japan thinks that it is also time to emphasize the importance of victim assistance in order truly to enhance the well-being of people in mine-affected countries. Since Japan has long recognized the importance of victim assistance, it has cooperated in many initiatives in this area, including projects in Cambodia, Laos, Nicaragua and Guatemala. Determined to continue to cooperate in the area of victim assistance, Japan now serves with Nicaragua as a Vice-Chairman in the Standing Committee on Victim Assistance, Socio-economic Reintegration and Mine Awareness of the Ottawa Convention. Victim assistance should be broad in scope and not be limited to medical assistance and the provision of artificial limbs, but also linked to the creation of job opportunities that enable victims to re-integrate themselves into their societies.

The international community should address the problem of landmines with all available mental and physical resources in order to achieve the "zero victim" goal. For its part, Japan is committed to making an active contribution to mine action so that we do not bequeath an Earth contaminated by landmines to the generations to come in the twenty-first century.

**Mr. Hollis** (Australia): Today I would like to outline the actions that the Australian Government has taken since signing the Ottawa Convention in December 1997 to play our part in ensuring that a world free of landmines is realized.

In 1998, the Australian Parliament enacted the Anti-Personnel Mines Convention Act, which gives force to the provisions of the Ottawa Convention under Australian law, making it a criminal offence for Australian citizens or Defence Force personnel to place, possess, develop, acquire, stockpile or transfer anti-personnel landmines. In keeping with our obligations under article 6 of the Convention, the Australian Government has become a significant contributor to international mine clearance, mine awareness and victim assistance programmes, with a particular focus on the Asia-Pacific region.

During the past year, the Australian Government sponsored the "Destroy a Minefield" campaign, which involved non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the private sector and government. The "Destroy a Minefield" initiative seeks sponsors in the Australian community to clear specifically named minefields in Cambodia. Every two dollars raised is matched by one dollar from the Government. That initiative was not solely a fund-raising campaign, but served to raise awareness of the problem of the devastating impact of landmines in affected communities. The Australian Government has been involved in mine clearance activities since 1989. The Government has committed a total of at least A$100 million to these activities for the decade to 2005. To date, the bulk of that funding has been directed to Cambodia, Laos, Mozambique and Angola.

As envisaged in article 4 of the Convention, Australia destroyed its stockpile of anti-personnel landmines in September 1999. That process was completed almost four years before we were required to complete it under the Convention. The exercise involved the destruction of almost 130,000 mines, or some 27 metric tons. As is allowed for under the Convention, a number were retained for training and research purposes. To carry this out, the Australian Defence Force developed an innovative and cost-effective method of destruction, using ammonium nitrate fuel oil and diesel fuel. That technique has attracted significant interest from other States parties to the Convention, and the Australian Defence Force believes that, for many countries assessing options for stockpile destruction, this method offers a cheap and effective answer. In order to assist other countries in this regard, the Australian Government has made available to States parties the technical report into the destruction of our stockpile and has expressed its willingness to provide additional information to those States requiring it.

Underlining that commitment, two Australian army personnel visited Peru in June of this year in response to a request for such assistance from the Government of Peru. The purpose of the visit was to assess the suitability of the method for dealing with Peru's landmines stockpile. We understand that, as a result, the Peruvian army will shortly destroy its stockpile, employing the techniques developed by the Australian army.

The leading role that Australia has taken on this issue has resulted in Australia being selected as a co-rapporteur of the Ottawa Convention's Standing Committee on Stockpile Destruction. Indeed Australia is an active participant in the full range of Ottawa Convention standing committees.

So, that is what we have achieved to date. But where do we focus our attention now? The declaration issued in September at the conclusion of the Second Meeting of States Parties reflected positively on the progress made to date but acknowledged that considerable work lies before us. While we acknowledge the rapid progress in expanding the number of States parties — there are now 107 — my Government sees universalization of the Convention as a central priority.

The Australian Government is contributing to global efforts aimed at promoting greater adherence to the Convention by focusing our energies on our own neighbourhood. Through our network of diplomatic missions, we have called on the countries of the South Pacific to adhere to the Convention. We were very encouraged therefore by the ratification of Nauru and accession of Kiribati, which occurred immediately prior to the Second Meeting of States Parties, held in September. The Australian Government is also working with the Australian network of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines to develop a collaborative programme to build support for the Convention among the countries of South-East Asia.

The Australian Government is also prepared to consider sharing its technical expertise with regional countries, for example, through the provision of training in stockpile-destruction techniques. Through the Government's mine action programme, we will consider funding activities under the programme, and we have made a commitment to provide up to 200,000 Australian dollars for advocacy activities.

I would like to turn briefly now to the Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May Be Deemed to Be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects (CCW), also frequently referred to as the inhumane weapons Convention. While the CCW does not prohibit the use, production or transfer of landmines, it places restrictions its on States parties. It is particularly important as it brings on board a number of key producers and users of landmines that have not yet joined the Ottawa Convention.

The CCW also deals with a range of other weapons, such as anti-vehicle mines, blinding laser weapons and incendiary devices, which are not covered by the Ottawa Convention. As a long-standing supporter, the Australian Government believes that the CCW continues to have an important role to play in dealing with mines and other weapons with similar indiscriminate effects. With that in mind, the Government has announced Australia's candidacy for the presidency of the CCW review conference due to be held at the end of 2001.

Members may be assured that Australia will continue to support the Ottawa Convention and to play its part in ensuring that a world free of landmines is realized.

**Mr. Kittikhoun** (Lao People's Democratic Republic): Let me join other speakers in conveying my appreciation to the Secretary-General for the comprehensive and informative report (A/55/542) he has presented to us on assistance in mine action. The report gives an overview of mine action undertaken in various countries throughout the world by United Nations programmes and other related agencies.

Every day, innocent people are being injured or killed by landmines and other unexploded ordnance still scattered on the surface or buried in the soil in more than 60 countries around the world. With the assistance of the international community, national Governments have put a great deal of energy into overcoming the problem and have done everything that they possibly could. The achievements have been important, but, unquestionably, much remains to be done. More concerted action at the international level is needed, and every effort should be made to intensify international cooperation to ensure success in this challenging task.

As a result of the heaviest aerial bombardment during the Indo-China war, especially between 1964 and 1973, our country, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, is today still seriously affected by unexploded ordnance. At present, unexploded ordnance contamination affects up to 50 per cent of the country's land. Found everywhere — in villages, in towns, along roads, on hillsides, in gardens and in rice fields — the bomblets, or *bombies* as they are known in Laos, simply strike their victims without distinction, including children, women and subsistence farmers.

To address this problem, our Government since 1996 has had a comprehensive programme with the objective of reducing the number of civilian casualties from unexploded ordnance and increasing the amount of land available for food production and other development activities. The programme is divided into

four important components: community awareness; training and capacity building; survey; and clearance. It is important to note that many successes have been recorded in the course of its implementation. Hundreds of thousands of people have been briefed about the dangers of unexploded ordnance, and as a result the number of accidents has been reduced. In addition, more than 1,700 hectares of land have been cleared and some 280,000 pieces of unexploded ordnance have been destroyed.

The programme has also trained more than 1,200 Laotians to work in the field. These national personnel are working very hard on the ground, and the majority are now able to perform their activities without the assistance of foreign experts.

We hope to achieve further positive results in the years ahead. Let me, on behalf of the Lao Government, express our sincere thanks to the Governments of Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Japan, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden, the United States of America and the United Kingdom, as well as to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the European Union, for the technical and financial support they have extended to us in our endeavours to overcome this problem.

It is our fervent hope that the Lao unexploded ordnance programme will continue to receive the necessary financial support from our donors, both bilateral and multilateral, in order to enable it to accomplish the tasks assigned to it.

As we enter the new millennium, landmines and unexploded ordnance continue to be a subject of profound concern to the international community. Let us work hard and together try to solve this problem, thereby giving those living under the threat of landmines and unexploded ordnance a chance to enjoy a peaceful and productive existence. It is our belief that, through a concerted global effort, with the United Nations as a focal point, there is every chance that we will be able to live up to the tasks assigned to us.

**Mr. Steinberg** (United States of America): The United States is pleased once again to co-sponsor the draft resolution on "Assistance in mine action".

The 70 million landmines planted in one third of the world's nations pose a tragic threat not only to individuals — some 300,000 of whom are disabled from landmine accidents — but also to peace, democracy and national reconciliation. These mines prevent refugees and displaced persons from returning from their homes long after the guns have gone silent, and they hinder transition from relief to recovery and development.

That is why the United States is strongly committed to mobilizing the resources needed to achieve a mine-safe world by the year 2010, a goal we are facilitating under President Clinton's "Demining 2010 Initiative". Since President Clinton spoke from this rostrum in 1994 against the terror of landmines, our Government has dedicated about $400 million to humanitarian mine action and demining technologies, and we will provide more than $100 million more in the year 2001. This is a significant contribution, but no Government, international agency or private group can on its own make more than a small dent in this problem. We must work together.

This year the United States is working with more than three dozen nations around the world to demine the most dangerous minefields, train humanitarian deminers and teach children and their parents how to identify and avoid these weapons. These programmes take place in all parts of the world, with the largest programmes in Bosnia, Afghanistan, Mozambique, Angola, Cambodia, Rwanda, Laos and Central America.

We are also using the best scientific talents in the United States to identify new techniques for mine detection and mine clearance. The Patrick Leahy War Victims Fund — named in honour of one of our nation's heroes in the fight against landmines — and other agencies are supplying prosthetic devices and medical, vocational and psychological assistance for survivors of landmine accidents in a dozen countries, working through the Viet Nam Veterans of America foundation, the Landmine Survivors Network, the International Centre for Rehabilitation and other dedicated groups.

Success in the fight against landmines is not measured, however, in the number of programmes or even in the number of landmines lifted from the soil, but in its impact on the lives of people in mine-affected countries. Here there are real victories. Cambodia has cut its landmine accident rate from 500 per month in

1992 to 50 per month now — still too many, but a significant improvement.

In Afghanistan, despite continuing instability, tens of thousands of hectares of previously mined farmlands have been put back into cultivation. In Mozambique, the clearance of thousands of miles of roads has allowed hundreds of thousands of refugees and displaced persons to return home.

It is gratifying to watch how quickly people resume their lives and regain their dignity after being informed that their fields, their villages and their schools are mine-safe. Rwanda, Namibia and Central America are also making great strides in eliminating minefields.

We are proud to work with the United Nations system to help achieve these results. We salute the key role played by the United Nations Mine Action Service under the able past leadership of Tore Skedsmo and Mary Fowler, as well as the future leadership of Martin Barber.

We also salute the vital contributions of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS), the World Health Organization (WHO) and other organizations.

We are also helping to strengthen mine action centres abroad; support the groundbreaking work of the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining and James Madison University; create, with the European Union and others, global sites to assess promising demining technologies; and enlist the support of the 44-nation Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council on humanitarian demining.

Another exciting development has been the public-private partnerships necessary to address this global challenge. For example, the United Nations Association of the United States of America is working with the United Nations and the United Nations Foundation on the Adopt-a-Minefield Programme, which generates private contributions to demine the worst-mined fields in Afghanistan, Bosnia, Cambodia, Croatia and Mozambique. The Survey Action Centre, working with the Viet Nam Veterans of America foundation and the United Nations Foundation, is helping to produce for the United Nations mine surveys of a dozen countries to help plan new strategies.

DC Comics has created more than a million mine-awareness comic books for the children of Bosnia, Central America and Kosovo. The Marshall Legacy Institute and the Humpty Dumpty Institute are purchasing, training and deploying mine-detecting dogs. Wheelchairs for the World is helping increase the mobility of disabled people in dozens of countries.

These actions reflect the best humanitarian instincts to address the tragedy of landmines one person and one mine at a time.

On a related front, the United States welcomes the international commitment to protecting civilians around the world from landmines, embodied in the Ottawa Treaty and the Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May be Deemed to be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects. We salute the Governments, international organizations and civic groups under the International Campaign to Ban Landmines that move the dream of a mine-safe world closer to reality.

For our part, since 1996, the United States has destroyed 3.3 million landmines. In 1997, President Clinton permanently banned the export or transfer of anti-personnel landmines and we are seeking to universalize this ban in the Conference on Disarmament. In 1999, the United States adhered to the second Amended Protocol to the Convention on conventional weapons, which contains key restrictions on landmine use. We are also actively seeking alternatives to landmines and we will adhere to the Ottawa Treaty by 2006 if we find and deploy these alternatives.

I know that many around the United States and many around the world would have us take a different course on the Ottawa Treaty. Still, this disagreement must not deter us from our common vision of eliminating the threat of landmines around the world by the close of this decade. Working together, we can meet this challenge. We owe the next generation of the world's citizens nothing less than the right to walk the Earth without fear.

**Mr. Sorreta** (Philippines): Much has been said about the imperative need for the United Nations to improve its working methods. Critics have said that, when it comes to the Organization's agencies, the left hand knows not what the right hand is doing. This is clearly not the case when it comes to mine action.

Mine action is an important humanitarian concern that would have warranted the creation of a whole new bureaucracy under our Organization. But rather than going in that direction, we have instead concentrated on creating a coordinating structure through which we are able to maximize the strengths of 14 United Nations agencies, as well as the members of civil society, in ensuring the viability and success of our mine action efforts. In this regard, we recognize and commend the United Nations Mine Action Service for its role as the critical focal point for all our efforts. While much remains to be done, much has also been achieved by the Mine Action Service and we join all others in agreeing that we should continue to offer the Mine Action Service our continued support.

The crucial step towards where we are today was taken when consensus was achieved on the need to approach mine action activities on a broader and far more comprehensive basis — that is, to not focus exclusively on mine clearance. With the recognition that we also need to emphasize the full and total impact of the mine problem, including the socio-economic issues and the importance of long-term solutions, mine action has taken on a whole new dimension, resulting not only in progress in demining, but also in our being better able to deal with the victims, the lands and the societies affected.

This evolution required the development, initiation, coordination and support of activities in which the United Nations had not had the full benefit of experience. We are glad that this approach continues to expand and that it now includes recognition of the need to provide assistance in destroying stockpiles of mines as an additional element of mine action.

As before, we are co-sponsoring the draft resolution before us, for it not only reflects the important developments in mine action, but also symbolizes the success of the comprehensive and coordinated approach that we have taken on mine action. This approach is described in a concise and pointed manner in the Secretary-General's excellent report on assistance in mine action. His report showcases the coordinated activities of the different agencies of the United Nations, as well as the work of intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations. The report also chronicles the commitment and generosity of the donor States, without which very little could have been achieved, and we join a grateful world in thanking them for their critical role in mine action.

I agree with the Secretary-General when he observes that the global landmine problem continues to pose daunting challenges to the international community and to the United Nations system. There has been a sharp increase in the number of countries and areas requiring assistance in mine action, placing further demands on finite resources. Mine-related activities will also have to take into account the increasing recognition that unexploded ordnance will also have to be dealt with in the future. While we must continue to make sure that the mine action activities of the United Nations have the necessary resources, we must also make every effort to ensure that the landmine problem does not continue to grow.

The landmine ban is one solution that the Philippines fully supports. We join the many others who have called for the universality of the Ottawa Convention. We believe that, if we are to move forward with mine action in a comprehensive manner, we must go to the source of these weapons and prevent them from ever being produced or deployed.

While a landmine ban is an important part of the overall solution, we have seen that parties to armed conflicts are still somehow able to circumvent all sorts of bans and embargoes. It is also therefore, important that we continue our efforts in the United Nations and elsewhere to prevent and reduce conflicts by addressing their fundamental causes and by providing the forums and opportunities for these conflicts to be resolved in a just, peaceful and meaningful manner.

**Mr. Aboulgheit** (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): Egypt attaches particular importance to the problem of landmines and to the international efforts to assist affected countries. We do so because we have suffered for over 50 years from the problem of landmines and unexploded ordnance.

It is from this realistic perspective that the delegation of Egypt has reviewed the Secretary-General's report on assistance in mine action and welcomes the attention paid by the General Assembly to the follow-up of this subject since 1993. The international community has also given increasing priority to the need to address this problem, reflecting its understanding of the threat posed by the problem of landmines, which must be addressed comprehensively, taking into account all its aspects and dimensions.

While we agree with the central tenet of paragraph 118 of the Secretary-General's report, emphasizing the impact of the mine problem on relevant socio-economic issues and the importance of long-term solutions, we nevertheless believe that this will provide only a partial solution to the problem. It does not address the problem in a comprehensive manner, although the efforts of the international community regarding the problem of landmines should cover all the elements and dimensions of the problem on an equal basis, including the humanitarian, development, economic, demographic and security dimensions. This is necessary if we are to provide a comprehensive solution to all these problems, rather than partial and temporary ones.

On the other hand, Egypt — one of the most seriously affected victims of landmines — finds it difficult to agree with the reference made in paragraph 118 of the Secretary-General's report that a new approach has emerged, which is no longer exclusively centred on mine clearance, but which has come to include mine awareness training, victim assistance, rehabilitation, reintegration efforts and advocacy.

Although Egypt supports these efforts, we think that it is necessary for this approach to dealing with mine problems to concentrate first and foremost on the effort to clear mines, since they represent a direct threat to humanity and to economic development. Next in priority would come other efforts, such as those cited in the report.

Regarding paragraph 122 of the Secretary-General's report, I believe that some clarification by the Secretariat is required concerning the last part, which mentions that the resources mobilized by the United Nations Voluntary Trust Fund for Assistance in Mine Action should be devoted to humanitarian purposes. This indicates that resources of voluntary contributions would be allocated for humanitarian purposes, whereas assessed contributions in the budget would be devoted to the mine activities to be decided by the Security Council. This means that the resources of the regular budget of the United Nations would be directed to the activities that are approved by the Security Council in the area of mines.

On the other hand, unfortunately, this year's report of the Secretary-General does not mention the responsibility of countries that have planted mines in the territories of other countries in the past, nor does it include any appeals to these countries to extend assistance for the clearance of those mines.

I would like once more to address the problem of landmines in Egypt. This problem can be seen in the fact that there are about 23 million mines and unexploded ordnance in Egypt that have been planted in an area of more than 280,000 hectares. A great majority of these mines date back to the Battle of El-Alamein and to other battles; the warring countries at that time planted the mines and left behind the explosives. These mines stand as an obstacle to the development of these areas, even as my country is actually trying to aid in the development of the region. In addition, they also pose a great threat to the population. Egyptian authorities, within the limits of their financial resources, are trying to implement an ambitious plan to clear landmines planted in Egypt. Work on the implementation of this plan began in July 1991 and continues to this very day.

In this connection, I would like to stress the following points. First, implementation of this Egyptian plan imposes a heavy financial and technical burden that should not be borne by the Egyptian Government alone, particularly since Egypt was not responsible for planting all those mines. Secondly, there is an urgent and pressing need for the countries that planted the mines on Egyptian land to provide accurate information and maps indicating their location. These countries should also extend assistance in the mine clearance operations.

Thirdly, the cost of clearing the landmines has increased greatly because they are now buried under many layers of sand, due to sand movement and accumulation in this part of the Egyptian Western Desert. This situation requires a sophisticated level of technology to clear these mines. Fourthly, the presence of large numbers of mines over a vast area of land stands as an obstacle to the Egyptian Government's efforts to exploit the natural resources of the region and impedes development efforts by the Egyptian Government in the Western Desert and in Sinai. Fifthly, these mines have caused and continue to cause very heavy losses and tolls that should not be ignored by the human conscience.

In this framework, and in the framework of Egypt's efforts to face the consequences of the problem of mines, during the past two years Egypt has been cooperating with the United Nations Mine Action

Service (UNMAS). As a result of this constructive cooperation, the United Nations has delegated a mission to assess the problem of mines in Egypt. This mission visited Egypt from 9 to 23 February 2000 to study and evaluate the problem. At the conclusion of this visit, the United Nations issued a report, dated 7 July 2000, that contains a comprehensive review of the problem of mines in Egypt and practical proposals to deal with it.

I would like to avail myself of this opportunity to express my thanks to the UNMAS unit in the Department for Peacekeeping Operations. I would like to thank UNMAS for the efforts it has exerted in this field. We plan to follow up with the Secretariat and with interested countries on measures to activate these mine clearance operations in Egypt, particularly in the Western Desert.

Egypt, for its part, established a high-level mechanism this year to organize the administrative and technical base necessary for dealing with this problem. It has set up a national committee to supervise the activities of mine clearance composed of representatives of several ministries and other concerned bodies.

The concept of dealing with the problem of mines has developed considerably since the signing of the Ottawa Convention. We have begun to deal with it from a new perspective that takes into account many considerations besides the mine clearance efforts themselves, including rehabilitation and spreading awareness. This broader nature of the problem is reflected in the title of the draft resolution that has been presented within the framework of this agenda item. It has changed from "Assistance in Demining" to "Assistance in Mine Action". As I mentioned before, although we do not object to this new orientation, we still believe that the international community should give priority to the process of mine clearance in order to avoid creating more victims of those mines.

Despite the rapid international response concerning the signing and ratification of the Ottawa Convention, and despite the fact that Egypt is in full solidarity with the humanitarian objective underlying this Convention, there are nevertheless numerous countries, including Egypt, that have many reservations on the Convention.

We have already mentioned those reservations in many international forums, and a more comprehensive study of the landmine problem is needed by the international negotiating forum established for that purpose — the Conference on Disarmament — because the Ottawa Convention has numerous shortcomings, foremost among which is that it overlooks the responsibility of countries that have planted mines in other countries. It ignores their responsibility to clear those mines. Moreover, the Convention does not take into account the need to increase assistance to countries whose territories have been exposed to mines, and it completely ignores the right and the responsibility of countries to ensure their borders and to defend themselves.

**Mr. Granovsky** (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): The Russian Federation attaches great importance to the complexity of demining problems. The continued danger of mines in various areas of the world creates a serious obstacle to socio-economic development and the rehabilitation of States affected by conflicts. There are also humanitarian consequences, including casualties among the civilian population.

We have traditionally supported efforts under the auspices of the United Nations to mobilize the international community to overcome the effects of the danger of mines. We regard demining operations as an important contribution to the post-conflict peace-building process and the strengthening of regional stability. We understand and sympathize with the suffering of people on various continents who have become victims of the indiscriminate use of anti-personnel landmines.

Sadly, Russia has had firsthand experience with this problem. Every year the services of the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Emergency Situations in Russia have to neutralize over 100,000 explosive devices. Many of them remain from the Second World War. As part of the anti-terrorist operation in Chechnya, our military engineers have to face the problem of making safe the most modern mines, which are designed to destroy both people and equipment.

We recognize that the prohibition of the production, use, stockpiling and transfer of anti-personnel mines must be the overall objective of the international community. The Russian Federation favours a gradual approach towards this goal through a series of agreed temporary phases. In this connection, we consider it important to ensure the broadest possible

accession of States to Amended Protocol II, the so-called mine Protocol, to the 1980 Convention on inhumane weapons. This document is based on a careful balance of States' interests, taking into account their security and self-defence interests. We attach great importance to the Conference held in Geneva last December — the first conference of States parties to the Amended Protocol II to the Convention on inhumane weapons — and the adoption of a document to help resolve the demining problem.

The Russian Federation is making a real contribution to demining operations. Our specialists regularly take part in mine-clearance operations in the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States. There has been wide international recognition of the work done by Russian military engineers in the territories of the States of the former Yugoslavia. We are also actively involved in helping resolve this problem by making available digital maps of mine-infested areas.

Russia's participation in demining activity is a vivid demonstration of its commitment to international obligations regarding anti-personnel mines and of its participation in efforts to overcome the adverse effects of regional crises and to ensure peace and security in the areas affected. This work is supplemented by our constructive cooperation in demining with the States parties to the Ottawa Convention. We are taking steps to upgrade our international participation in this area. In August this year, the Russian Government adopted a decision on measures to ensure the participation of the Russian Federation in international programmes, projects and operations for humanitarian demining. This decision deals with matters pertaining to assistance to other States in demining operations.

We reaffirm our readiness to cooperate with the United Nations and with all interested States in mine-clearance activities and to actively participate in international demining operations.

**Mr. Picasso** (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): In recent years we have observed with satisfaction the development of a genuine international political will seeking the elimination of anti-personnel landmines. These are noxious, clever and indiscriminate weapons whose use involves ethical considerations from the viewpoint of States as well as civil society as a whole. The resulting deployment of efforts, creativity and political commitment that have given the subject of anti-personnel landmines a special place on the multilateral agenda is nothing less than full recognition of the fact that their existence is a permanent threat to humanitarian law and that their use is an affront to the principles and norms of human rights, allowing no room for justification or interpretation.

Peru has been and will continue to be a permanent standard bearer for this cause: their prohibition. From the outset it has participated in the process that led to the adoption of the Ottawa Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines, being one of the first States to ratify it. Similarly, aware of the need to ensure its universality and full implementation, my country has also participated in the first two meetings of States parties, held in Maputo and Geneva. Peru is currently Vice-Chairman of the Demining Committee, which has been merged with the Related Technology Committee.

This intersessional work of promotion and consideration of that item has enabled the establishment of focused forums for debates designed to review demining regulations and the standards used to determine the direction of international cooperation, as well as the establishment of measures for confidence-building and peace consolidation. In this context, Peru believes that the planning and administration of programmes of action against mines must, in accordance with universally accepted standards, be determined by the armed forces of individual States, making them the central axis of national decisions on the subject.

In this spirit, Peru will participate in the forthcoming meeting of the permanent committees of Ottawa, to be held in Geneva. It is the third such meeting and is an example of the seriousness and commitment with which the international community has decided to tackle the common problem of anti-personnel landmines.

Peru is also a State party to the Protocol on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Mines, Booby Traps and Other Devices (Protocol II) annexed to the Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May Be Deemed to Be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects. It participated in the first annual conference of the parties and has submitted the required annual reports. It is awaiting with interest the

discussion to be held at the next meeting, to be held in Geneva from 11 to 13 December.

At the regional level, my country has supported, within the Organization of American States (OAS), the decision to transform the Western Hemisphere into a zone free of anti-personnel landmines that includes a register. It has also contributed to setting up a specific mechanism for international cooperation through a roster of demining experts to supplement national efforts to implement the Ottawa Convention.

Anti-personnel mines have been used in almost all wars, whether between States or within States, and have produced thousands of victims in recent years. Peru, no stranger to this scourge, has expressed its commitment to the objectives and purposes of the international agreements to which it is a party through the following concrete actions.

A working group has been set up with responsibility for the intersectoral and multidisciplinary coordination necessary to work out an action plan that will make it possible to fulfil the obligations set out in the Ottawa Convention within the time limit stipulated.

The army successfully carried out two demining projects on the border with Ecuador, which cleared approximately 300,000 square metres between January 1999 and March 2000. A project for demining the Zarumilla Canal, which benefits Peruvian and Ecuadorian farmers and people, is pending, awaiting financing. Thirty thousand anti-personnel landmines removed from minefields have been destroyed, and personnel have been trained for future destruction of arsenals. Securing lines of cooperation to finance this task is pending.

A national council to support the disabled has been created to support the physical and emotional rehabilitation of mine victims and their socio-economic reincorporation. Prevention campaigns have been developed in native languages in the affected zones on our northern border.

These important steps were possible, to a great extent, thanks to the support and cooperation of friendly States committed to the ethical and humanitarian principles of the cause. We thank Canada, the United States of America, Japan, Australia and Spain for their valuable contribution.

Peru believes that financial and technical assistance to affected countries cannot be separated from the objective of eliminating anti-personnel landmines. Along these lines, my country emphasizes that the Specific Fund for Support for Demining, Peru Account, is open within the framework of the OAS to continue to attract international cooperation for projects to carry out activities for prevention assistance to victims, and demining in the zones of the national territory still awaiting clearance.

Peru also wishes to voice its gratitude to the United Nations Development Programme and the OAS for the support programmes they have established with international donations to contribute to the resolution of long-term humanitarian problems caused by these devices. My country also acknowledges the important work carried out in this field by various non-governmental organizations.

The campaign to eradicate anti-personnel mines is a unique example of sustained international commitment to consensual ethics which initiates, in the opinion of many, in pioneering form, the long road towards a new form of global coexistence based on the acknowledgement of shared higher interests. This completely new milestone is both an inspiration and a permanent challenge that enables the will of States to be expressed as a universal standard that must be respected, even more when these weapons continue to be the direct cause of death, mutilation and intimidation to the lives of thousands of innocent civilians.

**Mr. Shaukat** (Pakistan): The consequences of the indiscriminate use of landmines continue to haunt the civilian population in various parts of the world. In over 60 developing countries,. including Afghanistan, Cambodia, Angola, Bosnia and Somalia, the irresponsible use of landmines as a result of foreign occupation or internal conflicts has caused serious social and economic problems. Today, in Afghanistan alone, there are almost ten million landmines scattered all over the country. While Pakistan continues to host over two million Afghan refugees, an important factor impeding their return is the landmine problem affecting their country.

Given the magnitude and scope of the global landmines crisis, the United Nations has an important role to play in efforts to deal with this problem. The United Nations has covered some distance in this area since a resolution on the subject was introduced for the first time, in 1993. While the United Nations Mine

Action Service is serving a useful purpose in terms of coordination, the role of other agencies, such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), is also important. Pakistan has closely followed the evolving United Nations role in mine action, especially in areas such as mine clearance and the development of international standards for humanitarian mine clearance operations.

My delegation has taken careful note of the Secretary-General's report entitled "Assistance in mine action", contained in document A/55/542. It provides an overview of the individual country programmes and involvement of the various United Nations agencies in mine action activities.

The report could have been more productive and useful if it had shed some light on the extent of the problem in its totality. For example, an estimated aggregate number of landmines strewn in each affected country could have been useful. Such a number could have given us a good idea of what and how much more needs to be done.

Similarly, the report does not clearly specify whether the resources deployed in each country programme are adequate, or more needs to be done. It is important that the Secretary-General's report give a clearer idea about the true extent of the problem and whether the current international efforts are sufficient to deal with it.

My delegation wishes to convey its reservations regarding the assertion made in paragraph 118 of the report, according to which a new approach on mine action has emerged "which is no longer exclusively centred on mine clearance". Pakistan believes that mine clearance or demining remains at the heart of all mine-action activities. Mine awareness, advocacy campaigns and victim assistance are, no doubt, important activities, but they cannot replace the centrality of mine clearance. There is no short cut to the actual removal of landmines in the affected countries, and there is no other sustainable solution to this problem.

We express the hope that the new approach enunciated by the Secretariat will not allow the diversion of scarce resources from mine clearance to other activities such as advocacy campaigns and so forth. In fact, we need to strengthen the hands of those who are actually undertaking mine-clearance operations away from the media spotlight. Advocacy efforts in the form of conferences, seminars and media campaigns should focus greater attention on the need to generate more resources for actual demining efforts in countries affected by this problem. Today, while the international community is well sensitized about the problem of the indiscriminate use of landmines, the resources available to tackle the issue are not commensurate with the magnitude of the problem. It is hoped that the international community, especially the developed countries, will contribute more resources to meet this challenge.

Pakistan, for its part, has actively contributed to demining operations in several affected countries. Our participation in demining operations in Kuwait, Cambodia, Angola, Bosnia and Western Sahara reflects our commitment.

The discussions on mine action should not be mixed with the demands for controlling the use of landmines, which involves issues that lie within the realm of disarmament. These issues should be dealt with in the Conference on Disarmament. In this context, Pakistan favours the initiation of negotiations at the Conference on Disarmament of an international legal instrument banning the transfer or export of landmines.

In 1997 Pakistan declared a moratorium on the export of landmines. We have also ratified the Amended Protocol II to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons and have submitted information pursuant to article 11 (2) and article 13 (4) of Amended Protocol II. Pakistan remains ready to consider further measures and initiatives in the relevant multilateral forums to address the problems arising out of the indiscriminate use of landmines.

**Mr. Babaa** (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) (*spoke in Arabic*): The problem of landmines and other remnants of war is still one of the priority concerns of the international community. This is the eighth straight General Assembly session to discuss this very important item. This reflects the importance and the interest the members have been attaching to the seriousness of the existence of more than 120 million live mines planted in 70 countries. The international community has repeatedly shown its concern about this invisible enemy, which not only threatens the lives of thousands of children and women daily, but in fact

maims the majority of those threatened and leads to socio-economic and environmental losses for the affected countries — particularly the least developed countries.

Despite the slight progress made in the last few years in dealing with this problem, international efforts remain insufficient. This has led to continued suffering by countries affected by landmines that lack the necessary resources to develop local capacities to plan and implement comprehensive programmes in this connection. Prominent among such programmes should be mine clearance, as well as the provision of modern technical training and information exchange aimed at eliminating the risk of the slow death that threatens local populations. Another priority is providing assistance to victims so they can recover from their injuries and be reintegrated into society.

The Millennium Summit emphasized the importance of the problem of landmines. Paragraph 9 of the Millennium Declaration calls for addressing this problem. In this context, we would also like to highlight the role played by the Secretary-General and his assistants, as well as the coordinating role undertaken by the United Nations, its specialized agencies and other international organizations. The Libyan Arab Jamahiriya supports the efforts of the United Nations and the international community to end this problem, which has led to the indiscriminate killing and maiming of thousands of innocent civilians and which impedes development.

We would like to thank the Secretary-General for the periodic report that he submitted to the Assembly in document A/55/542. Regrettably, however, this report, once again, does not refer to the countries affected by mines that were planted by other countries in previous periods, nor does it stress the responsibility of countries that have planted mines in other countries or call on them to provide compensation to the victims.

I would like to refer to the Ottawa Convention. We support the lofty goals towards which it strives, but we believe that it ignores something basic — provisions setting out the legal responsibility of countries that have planted mines in the territories of other countries and the right of affected countries to receive compensation. The provisions of this Convention do not distinguish between the legitimate use of landmines for the defence purposes by Third World countries that do not have the capability to defend themselves against stronger countries with weapons of mass destruction, on the one hand, and the irresponsible use of mines by aggressive States possessing all kinds of deadly weapons, on the other.

My country continues to suffer from the problem of mines that were planted in its territory during the Second World War. That action has led to an unprecedented tragedy which the international community should deal with, since it is the result of the warring of three countries on our territory and since this warring resulted in a brutal tragedy for all Libyans. Facing off on Libyan territory, these battling countries planted millions of landmines to impede the advance of the enemy. That war ended more than 50 years ago, but the mines are still there in Libyan territory and in the territories of neighbouring States. The danger is compounded by the fact that these mines were planted in the desert and, because of the movement of sand dunes, flash floods and the forces of erosion, were displaced and are now found in unexpected areas.

What is required now is to force the countries responsible for laying these mines to take responsibility for the killing and maiming of Libyans, to recognize their misdeeds, to provide maps of the location of these mine fields and to provide compensation for the adverse consequences of these mines.

We have an absolute right to have these mines cleared by the countries that planted them and to have these countries provide compensation for the adverse humanitarian and economic effects. The mines were not planted as a result of a civil war or an armed conflict between our country and other countries. They were planted in military operations during the Second World War between the forces of the Allies and the forces of the Axis Powers, operations carefully set down in history. The responsibility is quite clear and manifest, and the crime is clear. Our countries have borne the burden of this war, for which we were not in the least guilty or responsible. This is quite different from the situation in other countries in which landmine problems are due to domestic conflicts or civil wars.

My delegation has announced to the General Assembly the historic agreement reached two years ago between my country and Italy, one of the three States that planted millions of mines in Libyan territory during the Second World War. By this agreement the two countries agreed to cooperate to clear mines from

Libyan territory. We have also agreed on a system of compensation and rehabilitation for those who have been affected and on the establishment of a joint fund to rebuild affected areas, to help the handicapped and to establish a medical centre to rehabilitate landmine victims.

We would like to express our satisfaction that the Italian Government has started to implement this agreement. We look forward to the other two countries following the example of Italy, recognizing their responsibility and helping us to finally get rid of the mines that are buried in our territories.

Africa is among the continents to have been set back by a large number of deadly landmines on its territory. There are over 50 million landmines planted on the African continent. They are a hidden source of death and destruction and impede the movement of people, goods and services, thereby hampering development. A single African country that has suffered from tribal conflicts and foreign intervention possesses one third of those mines, a quantity that will require over 50 years to remove if the efforts of the international community continue as slowly as they are today. The international community must therefore give high priority to providing assistance to affected African States. It must make available the necessary financial resources to enable Africa to eradicate this problem, especially as the continent faces serious challenges in other areas — a fact that should lead us to redouble our efforts on every level to overcome this problem.

During their summit in Cairo early last April, African and European leaders reaffirmed the importance of establishing international cooperation and intensifying efforts to find a comprehensive solution to the problem of landmines. They also agreed on the need to clear landmines from Africa and to establish a campaign to assist and rehabilitate mine victims, as well as to provide financial and technical support to African countries affected by mines.

Arab countries are also suffering from this chronic problem. In April a two-day regional Arab symposium on landmines and their implications for development was held at the headquarters of the League of Arab States, in Cairo. Delegations from Arab countries and other international organizations participated in that meeting to consider the political, historical, developmental, legal, humanitarian, military and information aspects of the problem. The participants came up with recommendations to provide financial support and technical assistance to countries affected by the laying of landmines. They also decided on strategies to provide information about mines. Their recommendations also called for the establishment of local committees on landmine problems in the Arab world, the preparation of studies and programmes to ensure that the problem is dealt with, and contacting relevant organizations in order to exchange information and coordinate efforts.

The symposium also decided to establish an Arab information centre to deal with the issue of mines and the dangers they pose, as well as to exchange information and expertise and to coordinate governmental and non-governmental activities in the Arab world with regard to landmine clearance in Arab countries. The participants reaffirmed the responsibility of the international community for this problem, particularly of countries responsible for planting mines in the territory of other countries. They affirmed that such States should also provide the necessary financing and technical expertise to clear mines, as well as to compensate their victims.

In conclusion, my delegation would once again like to emphasize the importance of international cooperation to clear landmines in affected countries. We wish to thank the United Nations Mine Action Service and other programmes of the United Nations and its specialized agencies, as well as those of other international organizations, for their efforts in this area. We would also like to support the recommendations contained in chapter VII of the report, as their implementation will contribute effectively to supporting efforts aimed at dealing with this problem.

**Mr. Lee Kie-cheon** (Republic of Korea): Allow me to begin by expressing my appreciation to the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report highlighting the achievements attained so far and the challenges that lie ahead in mine-action assistance.

Since the issue of mine action was adopted as an agenda item of the General Assembly, in 1993, international efforts to tackle this problem have made some progress at the global level. The use of anti-personnel mines is on the wane; a de facto near-moratorium on the transfer of anti-personnel mines is coming into being; and the number of mine casualties has fallen considerably.

Despite all that progress, much remains to be done to resolve the problem of mines. Anti-personnel mines continue to pose a major threat to severely affected countries. Due to their persistent character, anti-personnel mines take a toll not only on people, but also on socio-economic development. They have claimed the lives of a large number of civilian victims, including women and children. They also constitute an obstacle to the return of refugees and other displaced persons, to humanitarian aid operations and to reconstruction and economic development. In response to those complex challenges, the international community must address the mine issue in a more comprehensive manner by simultaneously encompassing mine clearance, mine awareness and victim assistance. In doing so, we cannot overemphasize the importance of clearly defining and targeting mine-related programmes and operations.

The United Nations system, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), regional organizations and national Governments have recently been more involved in mine-action activities. In that regard, my delegation would like to stress the importance of the central coordinating role of the United Nations in generating synergy in this field.

Gathering accurate and timely information and assessing the impact of mines on affected countries will form the basis for effective assistance. In that regard, it is encouraging to see that the Information Management System for Mine Action (IMSMA), developed by the United Nations Mine Action Service and the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD), has been improved and deployed to an increasing number of countries. We also welcome the United Nations development of International Standards for mine action.

Furthermore, we note with satisfaction that the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has initiated studies on the socio-economic impact of mines on people and society and the effectiveness of corresponding efforts to reintegrate mine victims into those societies. As laudable and worthy as those studies may be, the international community should not spare equivalent efforts to reinforce simple educational tools that are increasingly valuable in saving the lives of many innocent people. Educational tools can significantly reduce the number of mine victims by increasing people's awareness of how close the danger of mines lies.

In March 1999, we witnessed the entry into force of the mine ban Convention, which aims at a total ban on anti-personnel mines. In December 1998, we also saw the entry into force of Amended Protocol II to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons, which restricts the use of anti-personnel mines. My delegation shares the view that the mine ban Convention provides a comprehensive framework for many aspects of mine action. However, Amended Protocol II also includes a humanitarian aspect in that it bans the indiscriminate use of anti-personnel mines. In our view, those two mechanisms should carry equal weight in dealing with mine problems in our current situation. My Government is now proceeding with its domestic process to accede by the end of this year to Amended Protocol II to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons.

The Republic of Korea shares the humanitarian concerns of the international community over the human suffering and tragic casualties caused by anti-personnel mines. In that vein, we have supported and contributed to several United-Nations-led mine action programmes. The Korean Government has been participating in the Mine Action Support Group, and has made annual contributions to the Voluntary Trust Fund for Assistance in Mine Action.

We endorse the Secretary-General's view that the United Nations should secure sound funding to meet growing requests from mine-affected countries. With that in mind, my Government will consider redoubling its support for the Trust Fund by making an extra contribution this year. Moreover, the Republic of Korea is providing financial assistance to several countries on a bilateral basis, and has plans to expand such assistance, within its capacity.

At the dawn of the new century, we need to renew our commitment to mine action activities so as to ensure for people in mine-affected countries the freedom to pursue personal development without the fear of being struck by mines. We believe that only through concerted efforts and cooperation by the international community, with the United Nations acting as focal point, can such a dream come true. I wish in conclusion to assure the Assembly that the Government of the Republic of Korea will continue to join the efforts of the international community for that purpose.

**Mr. Sun** (Cambodia): On behalf of the Cambodian delegation, I would like to begin my statement by congratulating the Secretary-General on his comprehensive report entitled "Assistance in mine action" (A/55/542). The report describes the daunting challenges and the strategies required to address all aspects of mine action in diverse environments. Those strategies must be well defined and targeted to meet successfully all the expectations of the world community and of the countries that are affected by landmines.

After years of strife and devastation resulting from internal political conflicts, there persists an air of restlessness in the aftermath of the devastating wars in Cambodia. With an estimated 4 million to 6 million mines and a great deal of unexploded ordnance currently buried in the soil of Cambodia, it is on the record that one out of every 380 persons in Cambodia has lost life or limb to a landmine strike. It is truly a tragedy that that country has continued to be one of the most severely mine-affected countries in the world. I am sure that members are aware of the delicate and complicated situation that is now being faced by the Cambodian people with regard to normal functioning of life in those landmine-contaminated areas; that situation poses tremendous obstacles to the country's development efforts.

Since 1993, the Cambodian Mine Action Centre (CMAC), which, in close partnership with United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations, is an integral part of the country's overall response to landmine contamination, has forged ahead with its prioritized plans on a broad-based programme of work. It has made significant progress in building capacity in the areas of mine marking, mine awareness campaigns, mine clearance, capacity-building and training activities. Casualty figures have been reduced significantly, from a monthly average of 600 casualties in 1992 to 56 in September 2000.

At this juncture, my delegation wishes to emphasize that the continued commitment of the Royal Government of Cambodia to implementing its programme to eliminate landmines remains among its top priorities. It has been focused on the programme and the strategies set by CMAC in 1999, in the hope of achieving more results in the demining process based on four guiding principles: land for settlement; agricultural land; land for development; and infrastructure rehabilitation.

Since Cambodia last year enforced its legislation on the banning the utilization, stockpiling, production and transfer of anti-personal landmines, some progressive measures have already been undertaken to neutralize the anti-personal mines buried in the soil.

Even given the progress achieved so far, we acknowledge the fact that a great deal of work and effort lies ahead in our quest to deal with issues related to increased support and assistance in mine action in Cambodia. In spite of last year's reform of its management and leadership, CMAC is still confronted with financial problems. The insufficiency of funding support, unfortunately, has compelled CMAC to lay off almost one fourth of its operational staff. We believe, however, that the donor community will remain committed to CMAC in a visible and constructive way and will extend its fullest support, as before, bearing in mind that CMAC was born with the support of the donor community and that it has ever since continued to develop as one of the most important national demining institutions in the world. At the symposium on mine action held at Phnom Penh at the beginning of this month, the Royal Government of Cambodia, together with international donors, expressed willingness to establish ongoing communications, to improve the ways of dealing with issues related to landmines, and to consider resuming financial support.

*The President returned to the Chair.*

Today, in spite of the difficulties that CMAC faces, and their financial impact, the deminers are continuing to do their duty to reduce the risks that Cambodian people face from the dangers posed by the mines that are littered across their land. My delegation is confident that the world community will continue to support Cambodia in the ongoing process of mine clearance and other related activities. The people and the Government of Cambodia certainly would like to express our deep appreciation and gratitude to the world community for the generous support and assistance it has constantly provided to help enable CMAC continuously to take the necessary steps towards attaining its main objectives. Mine clearance is as much a development issue as a humanitarian one. Mine action is not only a tool for development, it is also a feature of development. CMAC continues to encourage partnership, cooperation, collaboration and open communication in the spirit of the development of Cambodia.

At the global level, my delegation welcomed the March 1999 entry into force of the Ottawa Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction. As a State party to that Convention, Cambodia has observed with interest the progress of work by States parties in the implementation of the provisions of the Convention. We are sharing in the efforts of the international community in this continuous crusade, and we wish to join with the world body and to coordinate with its activities in the fight against all kinds of anti-personnel landmines. We declare this with unbounded willingness; it is in that spirit that Cambodia has been actively involved in the Ottawa process, in order to support the full spectrum of activities which form part of mine action.

My delegation welcomes with satisfaction the conclusion of the Second Meeting of States Parties to the Convention, which took place at Geneva from 11 to 15 September 2000 with a view, inter alia, to providing assistance for mine clearance, rehabilitation, socio-economic integration and the implementation of mine awareness programmes. We note with interest the inter-sessional work programme established by the States parties to the Ottawa Convention, and we look forward to the next meetings of bodies established under that programme, which will take place in December this year.

Cambodia appreciates the strong partnership of the world community, in particular the United Nations system, in its effort to address this humanitarian problem. We strongly support the central coordinating role of the United Nations in establishing and securing the trust fund with a view to providing assistance in mine action to all countries whose peoples suffer as a result of the millions of mines planted in their lands.

With that in mind, my delegation is pleased to be a sponsor of draft resolution A/44/L.44/Rev.1, on assistance in mine action, which is before the Assembly at its current session, just as we joined in sponsoring previous texts on this item. We hope that it will receive broad support and that it will be adopted by consensus.

**Mr. Petrič** (Slovenia): Slovenia has joined the European Union in its statement on assistance in mine action. Additionally, we wish to contribute some specific points to today's discussion.

Anti-personnel landmines do not discriminate as to their targets. It is claimed that they are intended for military purposes, but more frequently they kill, incapacitate and injure civilians. These weapons do not abide by ceasefires or peace agreements. Instead, they continue to afflict anyone who comes into contact with them for a number of years after the end of hostilities.

International mine action is therefore one of the most important, practical and effective humanitarian projects of our time. It is firmly based on the principle of the prohibition of those weapons with excessively injurious or indiscriminate effects, and on the principle of protection of civilians in armed conflict. It is an indispensable component of the evolving concept of human security.

Mine action is legally defined in the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on their Destruction. The number of States parties to the Convention continues to grow, and the Second Meeting of States Parties, held in Geneva from 11 to 15 September 2000, was a clear demonstration of the continued dynamism and vitality of the global movement to eliminate anti-personnel landmines and of the inevitability of a comprehensive ban on, and the eventual total elimination of, anti-personnel landmines.

The concept of mine action is a comprehensive one that includes the important sectors of demining and the destruction of landmines, the rehabilitation of mine victims and the creation of mine awareness. All of these aspects of international mine action make it one of the important priorities of the United Nations. Member States, non-governmental and other organizations, and trust funds can contribute to its success in a variety of practical, compatible and complementary ways.

Slovenia is deeply supportive of the objectives of international mine action and is committed to destroying its stockpiled anti-personnel landmines by the year 2003. Slovenia has also developed activities to support efforts for the post-conflict rehabilitation of the region of South-East Europe. A large quantity of mines and other unexploded ordnance remained in the region at war's end, and they have been claiming victims every day. They have prevented the local population from returning to their normal lives and refugees from returning to their homes, as well as the expeditious relaunching of economic activity.

Three years ago — in the spirit of the Ottawa Convention and within the general foreign policy orientation of my country — the International Trust Fund for Demining and Mine Victims Assistance was established, with the aim of offering assistance to the countries of South-East Europe in their mine action.

The International Trust Fund has since been very successful in its endeavours. It has established a genuine partnership with the competent authorities in the countries of the region as well as with other international structures involved in mine action projects, in particular the structures of the United Nations. The International Trust Fund has proved to be the most cost- effective and efficient way to clear mines in the region of South-East Europe. It has provided mine clearance per square metre for a cost as low as $2.50. The International Trust Fund in 1999 mine-cleared as much as two thirds of all mined territory in Bosnia and Herzegovina — to date, 7 million square meters in all — in Croatia, 1.7 million square meters; in Kosovo, 1.8 million square meters; and in Albania 100,000 square meters. In addition, 300 mine victims have received rehabilitation treatment under the International Trust Fund Programme. The International Trust Fund, which has proved to be the most effective and efficient way to clear mines in the region of South-East Europe, has to date attracted donations from 22 Governments in the amount of $56 million.

These are the reasons for our continuing commitment to the International Trust Fund for Demining and Mine Victims Assistance. We are grateful for the support of a large number of Member States to the Trust Fund and would like to assure them that their donations are being used in the most effective and transparent manner.

Every State Member of the United Nations can contribute to assistance in mine action. Many of the contributions made are practical in nature, while others consist of political support and awareness-raising. All of them are important and need to be recognized as such by the General Assembly.

**Mr. Rodríguez Castillo** (Nicaragua) (*spoke in Spanish*): The delegation of Nicaragua welcomes the report of the Secretary-General on assistance in mine action, which not only highlights the valuable work being done in this area by the United Nations system, but also stresses the important contribution being made by governmental and non-governmental organizations to the eradication of anti-personnel landmines, which have caused and continue to cause so much harm to defenceless civilians.

Nicaragua is pleased to have been designated host to the Third Meeting of States Parties to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction, to be held in Managua in September 2001, and looks forward to the valued participation of all States parties and organizations that are working hard in this difficult field. Similarly, we wish to encourage all States Members of the United Nations to become parties to the Convention so that we may put a definitive end to that scourge, which continues to inflict so much pain on humanity.

Pursuant to the provisions of the Ottawa Convention, we have duly submitted our report to the Secretary-General and continue to promote our national humanitarian demining plan, which we have been very successfully implementing despite the adversities we have had to face, in particular the effects of recent natural disasters, which have disrupted our mine action and necessitated its rescheduling. However, we intend to pursue the process of eliminating stockpiled mines and hope that we will have completed the total destruction of installed landmines by 2004.

In this respect, we express our thanks for the invaluable support we have received from the international community and various organizations for our national demining plan and the programmes associated with it. We wish to emphasize that we have been able to rely on an important component of international monitoring, the Programme for Demining Assistance of the Organization of American States and the Mine Clearance Assistance Mission in Central America. As a result, and striving to attain the goals we have set ourselves, we reiterate our appeal to the international community to continue supporting us in our fight against mines and in our special programme to care for victims and to facilitate their full social and economic reintegration.

We express our commitment to continuing to work for the implementation of all the commitments and programmes of work adopted at the First Meeting of States Parties to the Convention, held in Maputo, Mozambique, and at the Second Meeting, held in Geneva, Switzerland. That is why we believe that the

task of demining can wait no longer and that it is an urgent responsibility that all States parties share towards present and future generations. Similarly, we must pursue our programmes to destroy stockpiles, in accordance with the Convention.

Nicaragua is undertaking public education programmes to sensitize the population to the dangers of anti-personnel landmines and to the need for popular cooperation in their complete destruction. In this respect, we appeal to all States Members of the United Nations to consider how we may all join together in the noble task of the total elimination of anti-personnel landmines in all their aspects.

It would be a paradox if, at the dawn of the new millennium, humanity were to enter an era of great technological changes while so many innocent civilians and defenceless children were to continue to die and others, uninvolved in conflict, to be maimed by technological artefacts that humans had themselves created for mutual self-destruction. It is time to direct technological development towards the welfare of human beings so as clearly to demonstrate our resolve to advance in the construction of a better world and a culture of peace.

It would be unacceptable for us to take pride in the development of international humanitarian law and international human rights law if we also allowed landmines to remain an obstacle to the development of affected peoples, preventing the social reintegration not only of their victims, but also of all displaced persons and refugees who aspire to a better life and deserve all our attention.

We firmly believe in the irreversible advance of the humanitarian process of eliminating all existing anti-personnel landmines and the full implementation of the Ottawa Convention, a goal that is in our power to achieve.

**Mrs. Martinic** (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): The Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction is a valuable legal instrument in the context of international security, non-proliferation and disarmament.

Argentina fully shares the purposes and principles underlying the Convention. In this respect, my country's support for the prohibition of anti-personnel landmines is consistent with its disarmament and arms limitation policy of restricting a category of weapon that remains active beyond the conclusion of a conflict and that entails particularly cruel consequences for its victims, including civilians. It is therefore essential for countries that have not signed the Convention to do so as soon as possible in order to facilitate coordinated and effective action by the international community to alleviate the impact of the use of these weapons.

This vocation of my country is reflected in its conviction that freeing our region from the scourge of landmines is an achievable objective. Indeed, through the Political Declaration of the Southern Cone Common Market (MERCOSUR), Bolivia and Chile as a Zone of Peace, signed on 30 July 1998, we have agreed to move towards establishing a MERCOSUR, Bolivian and Chilean zone free of anti-personnel landmines and hope to extend it to the entire western hemisphere.

On 14 September 1999, Argentina ratified the Ottawa Convention. In compliance with its provisions, we submitted our report on transparency measures on 31 August 2000, reflecting our commitment to implementing the obligations emanating from the Convention.

Throughout the world, demining has become an extremely important humanitarian task. Countries with landmine-infested territory must simultaneously confront a tremendous deterioration of economic and social conditions and paralysis in health services and national infrastructure. Anti-personnel landmine clearance is a priority task, indispensable to public security, economic and social development and the protection of human life.

Argentina has highly qualified human resources for demining training and stockpile destruction. Our training centre for humanitarian demining trains and instructs Argentine and foreign military personnel and has mobile demining training teams to disseminate this instruction, which is offered to all organizations and personnel working in countries with landmine problems.

Here is where Argentina joins the contributing nations in providing human resources who can transfer all their experience and training in the tasks of removing and destroying mines. Argentina's commitment to the principles of the Convention has been reflected in practical terms in its contributions in different countries since 1993, with advisers and

experts in mine clearance who provide training, advice and supervision in the field in demining operations.

Technical assistance to demining in Angola, the offer to contribute to demining along the border of Peru and Ecuador in the context of the military observer mission known as the Ecuador-Peru Military Observer Mission (MOMEP), the participation of a team of Argentine army engineers in the United Nations Iraq-Kuwait Observation Mission (UNIKOM) in Kuwait, the experience of Argentine military experts in Central America and the contribution through the "White Helmets" initiative are some of the concrete actions that my country has carried out in terms of international assistance and cooperation. These actions, along with our continuing presence in international forums, show our firm commitment to and continued support for this legitimate and humanitarian cause.

At the end of 1993, the Argentine Government offered to the British Government to take charge of the clearance of mines planted in the Malvinas Islands during the 1982 conflict. The offer was accepted by the British Government, and currently there is bilateral consideration of ways to conduct a feasibility study, before the demining process is begun, which will establish under what conditions the operation can be carried out.

Argentina firmly supports the objectives of international and civil organizations in the efforts to eradicate anti-personnel landmines and wishes to stimulate the enhancement of international cooperation in this field by providing experts, training, equipment and a training centre. We must emphasize the relevance of the Organization of American States (OAS), the United Nations Mine Action Service and the Standing Committee on Mine Clearance in their work to help States parties in the development and implementation of projects by identifying technical and financial resources required for landmine destruction and by facilitating international certification. This task, which deserves our sincere recognition, should be promoted by all Member States.

The growing number of ratifications of the Ottawa Convention shows that far from weakening the security of States in any way, it is a measure of mutual confidence among the countries in a given region. This is demonstrated by the intention expressed by the countries of the Rio Group before their Oslo meeting to bind themselves to the provisions of the Convention, viewing it as a security guarantee for the Latin American region.

By enshrining fundamental principles of international humanitarian law, the Ottawa Convention encourages increased joint efforts to help victims of this scourge. Along with mine clearance and the destruction of stockpiles, this is the great task of the years to come.

The Ottawa Convention enshrined in international obligations the people's demand for the elimination of these weapons that have caused serious damage to civilian populations and whose negative effects persist for decades, well beyond the end of the conflicts that lead to their use. Our region is among those that have best responded to this demand, and this is shown by the fact that almost all the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean are parties to this instrument or are on the way to becoming parties.

The countries of Latin America and the Caribbean live in a climate of peace and friendship that is one of the objective advantages of our region. This has enabled us to be pioneers in setting up a zone free of weapons of mass destruction. The declaration of MERCOSUR, Bolivia and Chile as a zone of peace, as well as several resolutions of the General Assembly of the OAS, shows that we also seek to be a zone free of anti-personnel mines. We must all contribute with earnestness to accomplish this task. Argentina is prepared to do everything necessary to this end.

**Mr. Šimonović** (Croatia): The effectiveness of anti-personnel mines in military conflicts — frequently used as an argument by those still unwilling to sign the Ottawa Convention — indeed has proven itself to be a superfluous element in modern warfare, according to many military analysts and experts. Civilian casualties in the aftermath of military conflicts are often the main result of the usage of these, I dare say, monstrous devices.

The Republic of Croatia, as one of the most mine-affected countries, has a direct experience of disastrous effects of mines and therefore attaches utmost importance to mine-action assistance. Starting from its own experience, my country welcomes all efforts leading towards a global ban on anti-personnel landmines. We also welcome all constructive proposals and projects enabling the realization of a total prohibition of the use of landmines, and their destruction, and stand ready to cooperate with all other

mine-affected countries and all those who have an interest in fighting this disease.

Years of bitter fighting left approximately one million mines and unexploded ordnance scattered over the territory of the Republic of Croatia. Mine-suspected areas are estimated to cover 4,500 square kilometres. Such a high density of mines represents a tremendous obstacle for normal functioning of life in these areas, particularly in predominately agricultural regions, and hampers the return of refugees and displaced persons to their homes.

The lack of plans of the existing minefields presents an additional obstacle in the mine clearance process. Therefore, from this podium, I would like to invite all those who are in a position to help, to do so. Following the cessation of hostilities, any country or individual possessing plans that could facilitate mine clearance activities and choosing not to forward them becomes an accomplice in the tragedy of future innocent victims.

Despite difficulties, the mine-clearance process in Croatia is proceeding well and is carried out in accordance with the highest international standards. The United Nations established the Mine Action Centre in Croatia in 1996, which has merged with the Croatian Mine Action Centre established in 1998. This year we witnessed the transfer of responsibility from the Department of Peacekeeping Operations to the United Nations Development Programme, and we welcomed this step. However, since donor support is crucial to the programme's success, we appeal for continuous financial support for the United Nations programme in Croatia. In the course of the past few years, numerous delegations visited the Croatian Mine Action Centre, and, to my knowledge, all of them were very satisfied with what they observed.

The mine-clearance process is not only extremely dangerous and time-consuming but is also a very expensive activity. In this respect, a Croatian team of experts is looking into the most favourable solutions to achieve the safest and most cost-effective projects that would enable efficient mine action. In the past few years, the cost of mine clearance and other mine-action activities in the Republic of Croatia has amounted to nearly $150 million. The Government of Croatia has borne 90 per cent of these costs, while 10 per cent were covered from a donation fund. We are very thankful to all countries — particularly the United States, Germany, Canada, Switzerland, Norway, Japan, Sweden, Belgium, the United Kingdom, France and Italy — international organizations, regional organizations and non-governmental organizations — such as the Slovenian International Trust Fund, Roots for Peace and others — for their valuable contributions.

Experts from the Croatian Mine Action Centre have estimated that 10 more years of mine clearance, at the general cost of over one billion dollars, are required to be able to say that most of the work has been achieved. The Republic of Croatia presently uses the capacity of 23 authorized mine clearance companies, special police forces of the Croatian Interior Ministry and the Croatian Mine Action Centre in the implementation of surveys, marking and mine clearance. The development and implementation of new and sophisticated technologies in mine detection is expected in the near future. We hope that this will accelerate mine clearance procedures, lower its cost and increase the reliability and safety of mine clearance.

As proof of continual improvement in the mine-action process in Croatia, I would like to draw members' attention to the following encouraging trends. Last year we witnessed 53 casualties; this year the number has dropped to 26. Last year we cleared 24 square kilometres, while this year we shall clear more than 50 square kilometres. This year we started with two hours of mine-awareness programmes in primary schools. Next year the same programme will be taught in high schools as well.

Croatia looks to the follow-up of the Ottawa process as a catalyst for genuinely advancing mine action throughout the world. It is precisely the humanitarian nature of the Ottawa movement that has contributed most to the creation of a political will and to readiness to support this praiseworthy initiative. Based on our own experiences, we firmly believe that more forceful action is still required at the national, regional and global levels.

At the national level, I am pleased to say we have adopted the National Mine Action Programme, a plan devised by the Government and confirmed by Parliament whose ultimate aim is to resolve the mine problem in Croatia by 2010. We also initiated bilateral cooperation with Bosnia and Herzegovina aimed at

mine clearance in the border region between the two countries.

Regionally, Croatia plays a very active role in the Stability Pact Working Group on Mine Action and will host the first formal meeting of the Group in December. In the same regional framework, we have also presented the project for the Regional Centre for Personnel Training and Testing of Equipment, and we hope to receive broad support for it.

Globally, Croatia will work hard with all interested countries to support the Ottawa Convention in its next phase. The draft resolution now under consideration on assistance in mine action should provide a useful input to our deliberations on the preparatory process. The United Nations role in increasing international mine-related activities and cooperation remains indisputable, and we look forward to the United Nations ongoing contribution and involvement in this important issue.

**Mr. Wu Haitao** (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China understands the international community's humanitarian concerns about the indiscriminate use of landmines against innocent civilians, and we support international efforts in this regard. The Chinese Government attaches great importance to the issue of the indiscriminate use of landmines against innocent civilians. We support the reasonable and appropriate restrictions on the use of landmines.

Since 1992, the Chinese Government has conducted two large-scale mine-clearance operations in the provinces of Yunnan and Guangxi. According to incomplete statistics, these operations removed more than 2.2 million landmines and explosive devices of various types and destroyed more than 7 million tons of unexploded ordnance and other explosives. We have also cleared 240 square kilometres. We have cleared more than 170 corridors and ports for border trade and have restored more than 60,000 hectares of farmland, grazing land and forests, otherwise reserved for landmines.

The Chinese Government has actively participated in international assistance in mine action. We have provided the mine-affected countries with assistance. In 1998 China contributed $100 thousand to the United Nations Voluntary Trust Fund for Assistance in Mine Action, earmarked for demining activity in Bosnia.

Since last year China has cooperated with United Nations bodies and has organized the second international mine-awareness training course for participants from seven mine-affected countries. China has also provided them with detectors and demining facilities. China, as a developing country, will continue, to the best of its ability, to join international mine-action efforts and assistance and will try to open up more land to peace and tranquillity for mine-affected countries.

**Mr. Jacob** (Israel): As a nation that has long lived under the threat of war, Israel longs for the day when civilian life will be free from the threat of anti-personnel landmines. It is our fervent conviction that these undiscriminating weapons, which echo shots fired long ago and conflicts raging miles away, have no place in civil society. In times of peace they strike at the edge of innocence, shattering civilian lives and tormenting families. And yet, the past decade has yielded a glimmer of hope: in the Middle East and elsewhere, people from different nations who clashed on yesterday's battlefields are clearing the minefields today.

This, indeed, captures what Israel believes to be the most important theme of the effort against the devastation of anti-personnel landmines: cooperation. The report of the Secretary-General on assistance in mine action reaffirms the findings, widely acknowledged for over a decade, that actions by individual States alone can no longer quell the humanitarian threat posed by anti-personnel landmines. This conforms with Israel's general position on disarmament, which has long maintained that cooperative regional arrangements are the best mechanisms for curbing the proliferation of arms and for combating the scourge of landmines in the Middle East, a region where wars, armed conflict and political non-recognition are still common.

Such cooperation, we believe, provides a model for the international community as a whole. I should like to point out just a few small examples from the experience of my own battle-scarred country that illustrate this principle.

The Jordan Valley is still infested with anti-personnel landmines planted decades ago. Israel and Jordan, which forged a treaty of peace in 1994, have agreed to launch a large-scale project to demine the Jordan Valley. The project covers all facets in the fight

against anti-personnel landmines, from actually demining the landscape to educating the population at large and rehabilitating the victims.

On the heels of this combined effort, a broader cooperative venture was launched. Canada and Norway lent their resources and expertise to the Jordan Valley project as part of their overall efforts to reduce the effects of anti-personnel landmines. Now other nations have expressed interest in joining the Jordan Valley project. Cooperation, it seems, is contagious.

It must be noted, however, that even the most thorough demining projects will not suffice, in our region or anywhere else in the world, unless they are accompanied by a parallel effort to educate the general population about the dangers of landmines. As outlined in the Secretary-General's report, information-management techniques must be used to ensure that mine-affected communities can coexist safely with a mine threat.

To this end, Israel and other nations have taken an active role in the Mine Awareness Project of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in Angola. Our volunteers, and those of other nations, have worked to educate the population, treat victims and set up a special database. Israel has also made substantial contributions to the financing of this project. The Coordinator of the UNICEF project, Mr. Hanoch Bar-Levy of Israel, reported that the Angola experience offers valuable lessons to other mine-affected areas.

As I have mentioned, Israel attaches primary importance to regional arrangements as an answer to questions regarding security and stability in the Middle East. At the same time, this approach has not prevented Israel from supporting the efforts of the international community to curb the proliferation of conventional and non-conventional weapons and, where appropriate, from endorsing global arrangements that do not impair Israel's vital security margins. Israel's accession to the Amended Protocol II of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) and its observance of the restrictions placed on the use of anti-personnel landmines are clear manifestations of this view.

In addition, Israel has initiated a number of other steps aimed at controlling the proliferation of landmines and other weapons world-wide. In 1994, Israel enacted a moratorium on the export of anti-personnel landmines and last year announced a decision to renew the moratorium until the year 2002. We are now considering a more permanent arrangement which will extend the moratorium indefinitely. Israel has also supported the General Assembly call for a moratorium and hopes to contribute to an agreement banning all transfers of anti-personnel landmines.

Due to Israel's unique situation in the Middle East, which involves an ongoing threat of hostilities from neighbouring and regional States, as well as terrorist threats and actions along its borders, Israel is still obliged to maintain its ability to use anti-personnel landmines for self-defence in general, and along the borders in particular, in accordance with the requirements of the CCW. Accordingly, at this juncture Israel is unable to commit itself to a total ban on the use of anti-personnel landmines, as they remain indispensable for the protection of civilians threatened by terrorist infiltration and for ensuring the protection of the Israeli Defence Forces. At the same time, Israel supports a gradual process in which each State will undertake to cease proliferation of anti-personnel landmines, accept restrictions on their possible use and — once circumstances permit — ban their production and use.

Along those lines, Israel has ceased all production of anti-personnel landmines, and we hope that others in the region will soon follow suit. We are actively working to eliminate the need for landmines, in the hope that ultimately we can enact a complete regional ban on the use of landmines.

Let us hope that international cooperation will heal the world of the devastation caused by these devices and put an end to the hostilities that perpetuate them.

**The President**: According to the decision taken earlier, I now call on the observer of Switzerland.

**Mr. Helg** (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): Switzerland attaches great importance to mine action, which it has made a priority of its peace and security policy. Switzerland supports the United Nations in its fight against mines by providing it not only with financial means, but also with human and material resources, and Switzerland intends to further increase its effort in this field in the future.

We therefore welcome the Secretary-General's report on assistance in mine action. We are pleased that the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining — which was set up on the initiative of

Switzerland and which is largely financed by Switzerland — is able to provide significant support to the United Nations in the fields of research and operational assistance and to make available the Information Management System for Mine Action (IMSMA).

My country recognizes the key role of the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) in coordinating, implementing and managing the United Nations mine-action policies. We take this opportunity to congratulate Mr. Martin Barber on being appointed the Chief of the Service and to ensure him of our full support. We encourage the Mine Action Service to continue its efforts, particularly in the areas of quality assurance and the preparation of international standards for mine action. We note with satisfaction that close cooperative relations have been established between UNMAS and all the other relevant United Nations specialized agencies, funds and programmes.

My Government has taken note with concern of the grave financial difficulties of the Mine Action Service, which are calling into question not only the operation of the Service itself, but also the programmes and projects undertaken in the affected countries. We therefore invite the Secretary-General to present to the General Assembly, as promptly as possible, proposals for means of ensuring long-term funding for what is one of the essential tasks of the United Nations.

Switzerland is providing financial support to the tune of 5 million Swiss francs to many countries and organizations for their demining work. It is also providing experts to national and United Nations mine-action centres. These experts contribute to the coordination of demining efforts and to making sure these efforts are carried out in accordance with international standards.

Bearing in mind the joint strategy of the International Committee of the Red Cross and the World Health Organization, as well as the guidelines of the United Nations Children's Fund, Switzerland has promoted and supported a global, integrated and non-discriminatory approach to victim assistance. It has also assumed the co-chairmanship of the Standing Committee of Experts on Victim Assistance, which was set up under the Convention on anti-personnel mines.

This approach won very wide support at the Second Conference of the States Parties to the Convention, and it is now also being applied by UNMAS and the United Nations Development Programme. Emphasis is being placed on implementing this approach in pilot countries such as Mozambique, Afghanistan and Bosnia and Herzegovina. The approach adopted recognizes the role of both Governments and civil society in bringing about a real improvement in the situation of victims. It pursues two objectives: promoting coordination mechanisms within countries and elaborating coherent strategies for assistance to victims.

In the field of demining, Switzerland attaches particular importance to cooperation with local partners. In Mozambique, a priority-action country, Switzerland has established close relations with the national demining institute, while emphasizing the responsibility incumbent on the competent authorities for demining actions. The strengthening of local capacities makes it possible for the peoples concerned to deal with the long-term consequences of the problem, but it also means that the contributors must make a greater effort. They must trust the local potential, and they must be prepared to take certain risks.

Furthermore, the Swiss demining policy takes broad account of the socio-economic context and seeks to involve all concerned actors in the operations, in order to create stable conditions for peacekeeping in the countries. It is also our constant concern to link demining programmes with programmes of development cooperation and peace promotion.

The Swiss army is giving assistance in the field by providing human and material resources. The structures and capacities concerned are now being strengthened, and the activities will be further stepped up in 2001.

At this time, three Swiss experts, military and civilian, are on mission abroad, all within the United Nations framework, in Kosovo, Yemen and Somalia. By the end of 2002, a pool of 40 qualified experts will be operational within the Swiss army in order better to meet the needs of future international humanitarian demining programmes.

As concerns training capacities, the Swiss army, through the Partnership for Peace, is offering international training courses as part of the Information Management System for Mine Action programme. Furthermore, in the framework of the Convention on the prohibition of anti-personnel mines, a training

course in the management and destruction of stockpiles will be organized in 2001.

On the international scene, Switzerland wishes to stress two points: first, the universalization of the Convention on the prohibition of anti-personnel mines. One hundred and thirty-nine countries have signed the Convention and 108 countries have ratified it. This is the successful result of very fruitful cooperation between States and non-governmental organizations. The Second Meeting of the States Parties to the Convention, which took place in Switzerland from 11-15 September last, highlighted once again the importance of such cooperation and its very special nature.

Secondly, at the Second Meeting of States Parties, significant progress was noted in the implementation of the Convention. We note in particular the considerable efforts made by committees of experts during the inter-sessional period. They helped to shed light on still outstanding questions, to promote the establishment of standards, to develop strategies and to provide practical solutions to problems.

It is an honour for Geneva to have hosted not only the annual Conference of States parties but also the meetings of expert committees. In particular, we welcome the decision of the States parties to increase the effectiveness of these expert committees and the important role played by the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining in this process.

We would like to express our gratitude to Nicaragua, which will be hosting the third annual Conference in Managua next year. My country has always upheld the principle that the annual Conferences of States parties to the Convention on the prohibition of anti-personnel landmines should take place alternately in Geneva and in one of the affected countries. Switzerland would also be prepared to fulfil other functions in pursuance of the objectives of the Convention in the inter-sessional process following the next annual Conference in Nicaragua, as it has already done, in partnership with Mexico, in the context of assistance to victims.

Despite the success of the implementation of the Convention on the prohibition of anti-personnel mines, we must not forget that certain States — and not the least important among them — have not yet acceded to the Convention. We must therefore persevere in the effort to promote universal accession to the Convention on the prohibition of anti-personnel mines and to ensure its implementation.

One final point that concerns us is that of non-State actors. Within its concept of humanitarian action, Switzerland attaches great importance to the promotion worldwide of respect for international humanitarian law. The implementation of humanitarian principles means that all armed groups, including non-State actors, must be willing to renounce the use of anti-personnel mines. In recent months we have organized or supported various workshops on this question. We also discussed the matter at the ministerial meeting on the human security network, which took place in Lucerne last May. In this field, as in others, there are no ready-made solutions. This is why we invite the States concerned and non-governmental organizations to reflect on this question with us.

**The President:** We have heard the last speaker in the debate on this item. I should like to inform members that action on draft resolution A/55/L.44/Rev.1 will be taken at a later date to be announced.

**Postponement of the date of recess**

**The President:** I should like to draw the attention of members to the date of recess of the current session. Members will recall that at its 9th plenary meeting, on 11 September 2000, the General Assembly decided that the fifty-fifth session would recess on Tuesday, 5 December 2000. However, I have been informed by the Chairman of the Fifth Committee that the Committee will not be able to conclude its work by 5 December 2000. The Assembly will therefore not be able to conclude its work by that date. I should like, therefore, to propose to the Assembly that it postpone the date of recess of the current session to Friday, 15 December 2000.

If there is no objection, may I take it that the Assembly agrees to this proposal?

*It was so decided.*

**Programme of work**

**The President:** I should like to inform members of some additions to the programme of work of the General Assembly.

On Thursday morning, 13 November 2000, the General Committee of the General Assembly will hold

a meeting at 9.30 a.m. in Conference Room 3 to consider a request by several countries, contained in document A/55/238, for the inclusion in the agenda of the current session of an agenda item entitled "Proclamation of 31 August as the International Day of Solidarity".

On Monday morning, 4 December, the General Assembly will take up agenda item 43, "The situation in Central America: procedures for the establishment of a firm and lasting peace and progress in fashioning a region of peace, freedom, democracy and development".

On Tuesday morning, 12 December, the General Assembly will consider the reports of the Sixth Committee.

*The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.*

United Nations A/55/PV.74

# General Assembly

Fifty-fifth session

*Official Records*

**74**th plenary meeting
Wednesday, 29 November 2000, 10 a.m.
New York

*President:* Mr. Holkeri ..... (Finland)

*The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.*

**Agenda item 38**

**Zone of peace and cooperation of the South Atlantic**

**Report of the Secretary-General** (A/55/476)

**Draft resolution** (A/55/L.39)

**The President**: I give the floor to the representative of Argentina to introduce draft resolution A/55/L.39.

**Mr. Listre** (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): It is a source of great satisfaction for me to introduce draft resolution A/55/L.39 on behalf of the members of the zone of peace and cooperation of the South Atlantic.

Since it was established, in 1986, the zone has been an excellent forum for carrying out discussions and expanding the links of cooperation and friendship between African and Latin American coastal States of the South Atlantic. Argentina is pleased with the achievements reached in the implementation of the objectives the countries of the zone set for themselves 14 years ago. To date, we have held five high-level meetings, the last of which was held in Argentina in October 1998. Argentina's offer to host such an important meeting was due to my country's interest in securing peace in the zone and promoting cooperative relations among its members.

The States members of the zone have set clear objectives for ourselves in such basic areas as the strengthening of peace and security, finding peaceful and negotiated solutions to all current disagreements in the region, promoting democracy, good governance and respect for human rights, fostering trade and investment between the Latin American and African members of the zone, protecting the environment and living marine resources, cooperating in the fight against drug trafficking and developing the concept of solidarity in humanitarian emergencies.

With regard to peace and security, my country believes that nuclear-weapon-free zones such as those envisioned in the Treaties of Tlatelolco and Pelindaba, creating areas in which the use or threat of use of such weapons is proscribed, contribute to the achievement of the objectives of the Charter.

With regard to the proliferation of, and illicit trafficking in, small arms, the countries of the zone are convinced that peacemaking and peacekeeping should be fostered while limiting as much as possible the diversion of human and financial resources to armaments. The characteristics of the phenomenon of small arms proliferation vary from region to region. Thus, measures to deal with this issue should conform to the circumstances of the region concerned. Fortunately, the countries of the zone share a firm commitment, as set out in various worthwhile initiatives put forth in the inter-American and African contexts, to combat the illicit traffic and manufacture of small arms.

With regard to these issues, I would like to reiterate once again the call for the entire international

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community to cooperate with the zone's goals and to avoid taking actions that could create or aggravate situations of tension or possible conflict in the region. In this context, my country calls on all States to focus their efforts on resolving the current disputes in the South Atlantic in a peaceful, just and lasting way, in conformity with the purposes and principles of the Charter and the relevant resolutions of the Organization.

Argentina once again wishes to reaffirm its conviction that the goals of peace and cooperation underpinning the spirit of the zone will be realized only if there is full respect in the countries of the region for the institutions of representative democracy and for human rights and fundamental freedoms. In this context, we are pleased with the progress made in the last year with regard to restoring and consolidating good governance and transparency in the region.

Argentina believes that peace and development issues are interdependent and inseparable. It is therefore important to promote technical and economic cooperation, trade and investment among the members of the zone. In this regard, we view with satisfaction the achievements attained by the members of the zone in the areas of economic stability, State modernization, the opening up of markets and the privatization of State-owned companies.

We consider it a good sign that most of the States members of the zone have ratified the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, as that illustrates a commitment to the preservation of fish species. In that regard, although the Convention establishes a regulatory framework for the protection of living marine resources, some of the provisions of the Convention should be complemented by those of the 1995 United Nations Agreement relating to the conservation and management of straddling fish stocks and highly migratory fish stocks on the high seas, whose entry into force is essential.

Another issue to which Argentina would like to draw attention is that of the transport of irradiated nuclear fuel, plutonium and highly radioactive wastes. In that regard, I wish to express the concern of my country and of other coastal States about the risks entailed in the transit of ships carrying these sorts of wastes in the South Atlantic. We believe that the interests of coastal States should be taken into account when international regulations in this area are established.

The fight against drug trafficking and related crimes requires a concerted effort by the international community. Argentina therefore reiterates its willingness to cooperate towards achieving the objectives the zone set for itself in Somerset West in 1996 and in Argentina in 1998.

With regard to international humanitarian assistance, I would like to highlight the progress made in the "White Helmets" initiative, which was proposed to the international community and which has been dealt with in various resolutions of the General Assembly. White Helmets have provided assistance in various countries of the zone, including Angola, Argentina, Brazil, Equatorial Guinea and Sierra Leone.

I cannot conclude without acknowledging the generous offer made by Benin to host the sixth high-level meeting of the members of the zone of peace and cooperation of the South Atlantic.

Finally, I would like to invite all delegations present, in view of the noble objectives of the zone, to lend their support to draft resolution A/55/L.39.

**Mr. Moura** (Brazil): We thank the Secretary-General for the report contained in document A/55/476, which records the activities of many organs of the United Nations system in the zone of peace and cooperation of the South Atlantic.

Since the States members of the zone held their fifth ministerial meeting, at Buenos Aires in October 1998, we have seen a consolidation of the role of the zone as a framework for cooperation, linking countries on the two shores of the South Atlantic. The zone is an instrument that supplements other institutions and arrangements and that provides its member States with mechanisms to better coordinate their action in facing common problems. Three priority areas are at the core of our efforts within the zone: preserving the denuclearized status of the region, protecting the marine environment and cooperating in the fight against illegal drug trafficking. We recall that in 1994 the members of the zone, on the initiative of Brazil, adopted a declaration on the denuclearization of the South Atlantic, which was later endorsed at the fourth and the fifth ministerial meetings.

With regard to cooperation in protecting the marine environment and the conservation of the living

resources of the sea, Brazil is working bilaterally and multilaterally with its neighbours to finalize our respective proposals on the delimitation of the continental shelf under our jurisdictions. Brazil favours the adoption of new mechanisms within the framework of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea that would help prevent environmental accidents and would promote exchanges of information and concerted action.

The combat against drug trafficking should continue to be actively pursued; the zone can provide a framework for active cooperation in that area. The countries of the zone formally launched an anti-drug initiative at their fourth ministerial meeting, held in South Africa in April 1996. Subsequently, they moved to adopt measures proposed by the Commission on Narcotic Drugs. The countries of the zone are also pursuing bilateral agreements among themselves, cooperating to increase the effectiveness of their efforts against this form of organized crime.

The international community and the United Nations system, especially the United Nations Development Programme and the international financial institutions, have an important role to play in assisting the countries of the zone to further those objectives. The zone works as a catalyst for the promotion of dialogue and cooperation among the countries of the Atlantic coast of Africa, western Africa and South America. Each side of the Atlantic can benefit from the other's experience in the promotion of democratic values, the expansion of trade, investment and sea links, and the intensification of South-South cooperation. We expect that this process will be further advanced at the sixth meeting, possibly to be held next year. In that regard, Brazil warmly welcomes the offer of Benin to host the sixth meeting of member States.

The zone of peace and cooperation of the South Atlantic can also serve as a forum where organizations such as the Southern Common Market, the Southern African Development Community, the Economic Community of West African States, the Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries and the Economic Community of Central African States can pool their efforts to build peace and prosperity in our area of the world.

Brazil is a sponsor of draft resolution A/55/L.39, which was just introduced by the Permanent Representative of Argentina. We are confident that the draft resolution will be supported by an overwhelming majority of Member States.

**The President**: We have heard the last speaker in the debate on this item.

**Agenda item 17** (*continued*)

**Appointments to fill vacancies in subsidiary organs and other appointments**

**(i) Appointment of the members of the Consultative Committee on the United Nations Development Fund for Women**

**The President**: The terms of office of the present five members of the Consultative Committee on the United Nations Development Fund for Women, appointed under General Assembly decision 52/319 of 15 December 1997, expire on 31 December 2000.

Following consultations, I have appointed Croatia, Jamaica, Kazakhstan, Namibia and the Netherlands as members of the Consultative Committee for a three-year term beginning on 1 January 2001.

May I consider that the General Assembly takes note of those appointments?

*It was so decided.*

**The President**: May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to conclude its consideration of agenda item 17 (i)?

*It was so decided.*

**Agenda item 37** (*continued*)

**Implementation of the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development and of the special session of the General Assembly in this regard**

**Draft resolution** (A/55/L.40)

**The President**: As members will recall, the General Assembly held its debate on agenda item 37 at its 45th and 46th meetings, held on 31 October 2000.

I call on the representative of Chile to introduce draft resolution A/55/L.40.

**Mr. Tapia** (Chile) (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of its 80 sponsors, I have the honour to introduce draft resolution A/55/L.40, entitled "Implementation of the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development and of the special session of the General Assembly in this regard". The following countries have joined the original sponsors listed in that document: Australia, Israel, Kyrgyzstan, Mali, Malta, the Philippines, San Marino and the United States.

On 1 July 2000, at Geneva, the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly came to an end. The session followed more than a year of preparations and negotiations. There, the States Members of the United Nations reaffirmed their commitment to place people at the centre of the concerns for sustainable development. They assessed the progress achieved since the World Summit in Copenhagen and agreed on new actions and initiatives to continue with the implementation of its outcome.

The negotiations in Geneva were not easy, and, as is always the case in this type of process, there were aspects on which no agreement could be reached. Nevertheless, in the main it was possible to reach extremely important consensus agreements that will provide guidelines for the work to be accomplished in the field of social by Governments over the next few years.

The international community should be proud of those consensus agreements. But we will be even prouder once we have been able to eradicate poverty, create employment for all, and ensure a dignified and secure place for every member of our societies.

The text we are introducing today is of a more procedural nature than those that have been presented in earlier years, because of the short period of time that has passed since the conclusion of the twenty-fourth special session and this session of the General Assembly. Its procedural nature is designed to reaffirm the agreements achieved by Governments at Copenhagen and Geneva, and to provide continuity for this topic within the United Nations system by inviting the Secretary-General, the Economic and Social Council, the Commission for Social Development, the regional commissions, relevant organizations, the funds and programmes of the United Nations system and other relevant intergovernmental forums to grant priority to the adoption of those measures required for the effective implementation of all the commitments and undertakings set out in the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action and in the outcome document of the twenty-fourth special session.

The draft resolution also expresses its deep appreciation to the Government and people of Switzerland for contributing to the successful outcome of the Geneva session. Finally, the draft requests the Secretary-General to submit to the General Assembly at its fifty-sixth session a report on this question.

Although the text is of a procedural nature, negotiations thereon were not without their difficulties. This attests to the complexity of the topic and should serve as a warning in respect of future efforts in this area. We hope that future negotiations will continue to be marked by the lofty perspective that has always characterized the manner in which the topic of social development in the United Nations.

Finally, Chile would like to convey its most sincere gratitude to Mrs. Marcela Nicodemos, Counsellor of the Mission of Brazil, who led the informal consultations with her well-known effectiveness, professionalism and good humour. We also wish her the best of luck in her future endeavours.

**The President**: We shall now proceed to consider draft resolution A/55/L.40.

I should like to announce that, since the publication of the draft resolution, Gabon has become a co-sponsor.

The Assembly will now take a decision on draft resolution A/55/L.40. May I take it that the Assembly decides to adopt draft resolution A/55/L.40?

*Draft resolution A/55/L.40 was adopted (resolution 55/46).*

**The President**: May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to conclude its consideration of agenda item 37?

*It was so decided.*

*Mr. Pradhan (Bhutan), Vice-President, took the Chair.*

**Agenda item 33** (*continued*)

**Culture of peace**

**Draft resolution** (A/55/L.43/Rev.1)

**The Acting President**: Members will recall that the General Assembly held a debate on this item at its 49th plenary meeting, on 2 November 2000.

I give the floor to the representative of Bangladesh to introduce draft resolution A/55/L.43/Rev.1.

**Mr. Chowdhury** (Bangladesh): I have the pleasure to introduce, on behalf of the co-sponsors, draft resolution A/55/L.43/Rev.1, entitled "International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World (2001-2010)".

Since the publication of document A/55/L.43/Rev.1, four additional co-sponsors have joined us: Cuba, Guyana, Myanmar and Tunisia. This brings the total number of co-sponsors to 59.

By its resolution 53/25, the General Assembly proclaimed the decade 2001-2010 as the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World. In today's draft, we reaffirm the Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace, adopted by the General Assembly in September 1999 through its resolution 53/243.

We are emphasizing the particular relevance of the special session of the General Assembly for the follow-up to the World Summit for Children, to the World Conference against racism and to the United Nations for Human Rights Education, having particular relevance to the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World.

In the operative paragraphs, the draft resolution recognizes that the objective of the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World is to further strengthen the global movement for a culture of peace following the observance of the International Year for the Culture of Peace in 2000 — that is, this year. It also invites Member States to place greater emphasis on and expand their activities promoting a culture of peace and non-violence, in particular during the Decade, at the national, regional and international levels and to ensure that peace and non-violence is fostered at all levels. We note with particular pleasure that, during the International Year for the Culture of Peace, a number of countries at the national level undertook extensive activities to promote a culture of peace and non-violence.

This draft resolution welcomes the establishment of national committees and national focal points in over 160 countries in the context of the observance of the International Year for the Culture of Peace and stresses the importance of their continued close involvement in furthering the objectives of the Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace and in the effective observance of the Decade. The draft resolution also encourages the establishment of such bodies in the remaining countries.

The draft resolution designates the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization as the lead agency for the Decade with responsibility for coordinating the activities of the organizations of the United Nations system to promote a culture of peace, as well as liaison with the other organizations concerned in this matter. It recognizes the important role of relevant United Nations bodies, in particular the United Nations Children's Fund and the University for Peace, in further promoting a culture of peace and non-violence, particularly by means of special activities during the Decade at national, regional and international levels.

In operative paragraph 9, the draft resolution invites civil society at the local, regional and national levels to widen the scope of their activities to promote a culture of peace and non-violence, engaging in partnerships and sharing information, thus contributing to a global movement for a culture of peace, and encourages civil society, including non-governmental organizations, to further the objectives of the Decade by adopting their own programme of activities to complement the initiatives of Member States, the organizations of the United Nations system and other global and regional organizations.

There is a need for a technical correction in this draft resolution. I would draw the attention of the General Assembly to paragraphs 11 and 13, in which the General Assembly session referred to is mentioned as the "sixty-first session". Actually, the session in year 2005 will be the sixtieth session. Thus, in operative paragraphs 11 and 13, the words "sixty-first" should be replaced by the word "sixtieth".

I hope that, in view of the contents of this draft resolution and of the large number of sponsors, it will

be possible for the Assembly to adopt it by consensus. We again thank the sponsors for joining in this draft resolution.

**The Acting President**: The Assembly will now take a decision on draft resolution A/55/L.43/Rev.1, entitled "International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World (2001-2010)", as orally corrected.

May I take it that the Assembly decides to adopt the draft resolution?

*Draft resolution A/55/L.43/Rev.1, as orally corrected, was adopted (resolution 55/47).*

**The Acting President:** May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to conclude its consideration of agenda item 33?

*It was so decided.*

**Agenda item 174** *(continued)*

**The role of the United Nations in promoting a new global human order**

**Draft resolution** (A/55/L.15/Rev.2)

**The Acting President:** I call on the representative of Guyana to introduce draft resolution A/55/L.15/Rev.2.

**Mr. Insanally** (Guyana): I take the floor to introduce draft resolution A/55/L.15/Rev. 2, entitled, "The role of the United Nations in promoting a new global human order," on behalf of the sponsors.

As we stated before the Assembly when this item was debated on 25 October, the concept of a new global human order is aimed at promoting a new and enlightened partnership for peace and development involving all actors of the world community, based on mutual respect, democratic governance and popular participation, to deal with the challenges of development and poverty eradication and to arrest the growing disparities among and within nations. It is inspired by a vision of the enormous potential for human development created by the end of the cold war, the accelerated pace of technological development and the deepening interdependence of nations. At the same time, it is dictated by the realization that this potential remains virtually untapped and that instead, over the last two decades, there has been a gradual but definite displacement of development from the international policy agenda.

The reason for this gap between expectations and reality and for the failure of development policies is not hard to understand for, while every international agreement reached during the past decade — from Rio's Agenda 21 to the recently adopted Millennium Declaration — has highlighted the importance of certain fundamental human values for the successful pursuit of development, the prevailing paradigm, based as it is on globalization and economic neo-liberalism, is devoid of any humanistic consideration and, consequently, of any real prospect for success.

The initiative of a new global human order is thus an attempt to identify and address the gaps in international cooperation that have impeded the effective implementation of the many initiatives on development pursued by the United Nations and the international community. It is also an effort to come to grips with the core questions of political will and resources. Equally important, it is an endeavour to instil a spirit of humanism into the Agenda for Development so that all may be able to benefit from the new economic forces of globalization.

As experience has clearly shown by now, the complex issue of development cannot be addressed by the continued pursuit of old models and strategies that are inappropriate to the new era in which we live. Nor can it simply be farmed out to the market, which is merely the servant, and not the master, of human endeavour. It is a challenge that requires a serious dialogue among Governments, based not only on political and economic considerations, but also on ethical and moral principles capable of creating a new basis for international cooperation that is both humane and just. Such a dialogue, we believe, should ideally be undertaken here at the United Nations, which because of the universality of its Charter has an obligation to take the lead in resolving these issues.

The draft resolution before us thus departs from a recognition of the important role that the United Nations must play in the creation of a new global human order. It recognizes the centrality of the well-being of people and the full development of their potential to the overall goal of sustainable development. It points to the growing disparities between rich and poor in both the North and the South, which speak to our common humanity and beg our

common concern. The draft resolution therefore reflects a common determination to promote the economic and social advancement of all peoples and a sense of urgency for the revitalization of international cooperation to that end. At the same time, the draft resolution expressly emphasizes the principle of responsibility on the part of countries for their development processes.

In the preambular paragraphs particular attention is drawn to the goals and targets agreed upon in the Millennium Declaration, which provide, we believe, an important impetus for renewed action by the international community to promote development and poverty eradication. The draft resolution also takes note of the Declaration of the South Summit, in which leaders of the South, after reviewing the current state of international economic relations, expressed the need for a new global human order.

The operative part of the text stresses the need for a broad-based consensus for action, within a comprehensive and holistic framework, towards the achievement of the goals of development and poverty eradication. The Secretary-General is accordingly requested to seek the views of Member States, as well as agencies and organizations of the United Nations system, on the promotion of a new global human order. On the basis of these submissions, the Assembly will then be able to determine what the essential components of this new order should be and what further steps should be taken for its creation.

I wish to inform the Assembly that the Government of Guyana, in bringing this initiative to the attention of the Assembly, has offered some preliminary ideas, contained in documents A/55/229 and A/55/496. This contribution is made with a view to sparking the discussion and to providing an indication of the kinds of issues that may be considered, without prejudice to the ideas that other Member States and the United Nations agencies may have.

I should also note the decision to resume the debate on the item not at the fifty-sixth session, but at the fifty-seventh session of the General Assembly. This has been agreed to by the sponsors in response to the concerns of a few delegations that have contended that the proposal might duplicate or disturb processes already under way. As I have previously stated, and as is implied in the preambular paragraphs of the draft resolution, it is our hope that these efforts will bear fruit. However, past experience and present circumstances do not allow us to be sanguine about their outcome. In any case, the issue we have raised here is a much larger one — namely, the creation of a new partnership, indeed a new paradigm, for development based on justice and equity, mutual respect and mutual advantage.

Finally, I should mention that the draft resolution before the Assembly is the result of extensive consultations with Member States and represents an accommodation of the various concerns of the delegations that participated in these discussions. In thanking them, and especially the sponsors, for their cooperation and support, I now commend draft resolution A/55/L.15/Rev.2 to the Assembly for adoption by consensus.

**The Acting President**: I would like to announce that there is one more sponsor of the draft resolution under consideration: Myanmar.

The Assembly will now take a decision on draft resolution A/55/L.15/Rev.2.

May I take it that the Assembly decides to adopt draft resolution A/55/L.15/Rev.2?

*Draft resolution A/55/L.15/Rev.2 was adopted (resolution 55/48).*

**The Acting President**: I call on the representative of the United States, who wishes to speak in explanation of position on the resolution just adopted.

May I remind delegations that explanations of vote or position are limited to 10 minutes and should be made by delegations from their seats.

**Mr. Snyder** (United States of America): Effectively responding to the challenges of achieving sustainable development and increasing human well-being in all countries is an important United States Government goal. Because of this interest, the United States Government is closely involved in discussions of the many relevant development issues at United Nations meetings and other appropriate forums.

While we understand the motivations lying behind this resolution, we believe it duplicates many other ongoing international initiatives related to sustainable development objectives. The United States Government is concerned by the potential of this

resolution to lead towards non-productive and duplicative discussions in the future.

The United Nations documents accompanying this resolution, A/55/229 and A/55/496, in explaining the strategy for promoting a new global human order, call for the implementation of specific policies to which the United States Government is strongly opposed. These include enlarging United Nations responsibilities beyond the bounds of the United Nations Charter and infringing on the agreed mandates of other international institutions.

The same documents concentrate almost exclusively on international responsibility for achieving economic growth in developing countries. They do not address the dramatic differences in economic performance among developing countries over the past four decades. Many developing countries have achieved unprecedented income growth and poverty reduction during that period, with per capita income rising at much higher rates than in industrialized countries. Many other developing countries have only suffered economic stagnation, although they operated within the same international system and sometimes started with population and natural resource bases equivalent to those of more successful countries. Why was this so? The new global human order, as presented here, ignores this key function.

We believe the lack of balance at the core of the new global human order proposal threatens to revive sterile past debates on important development questions at a time when there have been significant changes in thinking at both national and international levels concerning the best routes towards sustainable development for all. There is general agreement that pragmatic, practical solutions are needed most now. We hope that the report resulting from this resolution will take such considerations fully into account.

**The Acting President**: We have heard the only speaker in explanation of vote.

May I take it that it is the wish of the Assembly to conclude its consideration of agenda item 174?

*It was so decided.*

**Agenda item 38** (*continued*)

**Zone of peace and cooperation of the South Atlantic**

**Report of the Secretary-General** (A/55/476)

**Draft resolution** (A/55/L.39)

**The Acting President**: We shall now proceed to consider draft resolution A/55/L.39.

I call on the representative of the United States, who wishes to speak in explanation of vote before the voting.

May I remind delegations that explanations of vote are limited to 10 minutes and should be made by delegations from their seats.

**Mr. Snyder** (United States of America): The United States will once again abstain in the voting on this draft resolution due to our belief that internationally recognized zones should be created through multilateral regional forums and not through United Nations resolutions.

**The Acting President**: The Assembly will now take a decision on draft resolution A/55/L.39.

A recorded vote has been requested.

*A recorded vote was taken.*

*In favour*:

Afghanistan, Algeria, Andorra, Angola, Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Azerbaijan, Bahamas, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Barbados, Belarus, Belgium, Benin, Bolivia, Brazil, Brunei Darussalam, Bulgaria, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Canada, Cape Verde, Chile, China, Colombia, Comoros, Congo, Costa Rica, Croatia, Cuba, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Ecuador, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Finland, France, Gabon, Gambia, Georgia, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Grenada, Guatemala, Guinea, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Hungary, Iceland, India, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Latvia, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Maldives, Mali, Malta, Marshall Islands, Mexico, Monaco, Mongolia, Morocco, Mozambique, Myanmar, Namibia, Nauru, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway,

Oman, Pakistan, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, Republic of Moldova, Romania, San Marino, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Singapore, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Sweden, Thailand, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Togo, Tonga, Tunisia, Turkey, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United Republic of Tanzania, Uruguay, Venezuela, Zambia.

*Against:*

None.

*Abstaining:*

United States of America.

*Draft resolution A/55/L.39 was adopted by 119 votes to none, with 1 abstention (resolution 55/49).*

[Subsequently the delegations of Botswana, Nepal and Nigeria informed the Secretariat that they had intended to vote in favour.]

**The Acting President**: I call on the representative of France, who wishes to speak in explanation of vote on the resolution just adopted.

May I remind delegations that explanations of vote are limited to 10 minutes and should be made by delegations from their seats.

**Mr. Brunet** (France) (*spoke in French*): The French delegation voted in favour of resolution 55/49. However, France wishes to recall its reservations regarding the concept of the zone of peace, because of the remaining uncertainty about the geographical limits of the proposed zone, the exact nature of obligations incumbent on States involved and respect for the rules of international law, particularly as regards the use of international air space and waterways.

**The Acting President**: We have heard the only speaker in explanation of vote after the voting.

May I take it that it is the wish of the Assembly to conclude its consideration of agenda item 38?

*It was so decided.*

*The meeting rose at 11 a.m.*

United Nations A/55/PV.75

# General Assembly

Fifty-fifth session

*Official Records*

**75**th plenary meeting
Wednesday, 29 November 2000, 3 p.m.
New York

*President:* Mr. Holkeri ..... (Finland)

*The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.*

**Agenda item 41**

**Question of Palestine**

**Report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People** (A/55/35)

**Report of the Secretary-General** (A/55/639)

**Draft resolutions** (A/55/L.45, A/55/L.46, A/55/L.47 and A/55/L.48)

**The President**: I first give the floor to Mr. Ibra Deguene Ka of Senegal, in his capacity as Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, who will introduce draft resolutions A/55/L.45 to L.48 in the course of his statement.

**Mr. Ka** (Senegal), Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (*spoke in French*): It is always an honour and a pleasure for me to take the floor in my capacity as Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People during this annual debate in the General Assembly on the question of Palestine. It is also a pleasure to take this opportunity to congratulate you once again, Sir, on your election to the presidency of the Assembly and for the talent with which you are conducting our work during this session.

The item we are discussing today was first brought before the General Assembly in 1947. In the years that followed the adoption of the resolution on the division of Palestine, the question of Palestine and the rights of the Palestinian people remained overshadowed by the conflicts and hostilities that broke out in the region and were mainly discussed as part of a larger Middle East crisis or treated as a refugee issue. The item was re-introduced in the agenda of the Assembly in 1974. That same year, the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people were reaffirmed and spelled out as the right to self-determination without external interference, the right to national independence and sovereignty, and the right of Palestinians to return to their homes and regain the property that had been stripped from them.

A year later, the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People was established. The General Assembly authorized the Committee to spare no effort in promoting the implementation of the Assembly's recommendations. It requested the Committee to keep the situation relating to the question of Palestine under review; to report and make suggestions to the Assembly or the Security Council, as appropriate; and to promote the dissemination of information on its recommendations through non-governmental organizations and other appropriate means.

Over time, the Assembly has gradually expanded the Committee's mandate to include new activities. New members and observers have also expanded the ranks of the Committee. For the past 25 years, through

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the means available to it, the Committee has indeed spared no effort in promoting the exercise by the Palestinian people of its inalienable rights — its eternal rights.

The Committee welcomed the 1991 Madrid Middle East Peace Conference, which launched the current peace process and which was based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). The historic compromise of 1993, which was based on mutual recognition by the two parties and the establishment of a negotiating process aimed at implementing those two Security Council resolutions — this compromise in which the Palestinians participated as full and equal partners — was an important historic milestone. The agreements concluded since, including the Wye River Memorandum and the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum, signalled that, despite all sorts of obstacles, a diplomatic solution that takes into account the rights and needs of both sides was indeed possible. The Committee was encouraged by some of the steps taken between 1994 and 1998 to implement those agreements.

Among the concrete accomplishments of the past year, I will note the partial release of Palestinian prisoners, the opening of a southern safe-passage route between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, the further redeployment of Israeli troops from some areas of the West Bank, the resumption of the interim and permanent status talks, and the signing of the Israeli-Palestinian agreements on the implementation of economic issues and on the construction work on the port of Gaza. In spite of the lack of tangible results, the Committee also welcomed the Camp David Peace Summit of last July, and we were encouraged by the commitment of the two parties to continue their efforts to conclude an agreement on all the permanent-status issues.

Notwithstanding the difficulties that the peace negotiations had encountered, and despite the impasse that was created at the end of July by the discussions on Jerusalem, we all had nourished hopes that progress would still be possible and that the parties were about to get down to further discussions of the sensitive permanent-status issues.

Regrettably, our expectations were dashed on 28 September last. The Committee members, along with the rest of the international community, were greatly dismayed by the violent confrontations between the Israel Defence Forces and police and Palestinian civilians at the holy site of Al-Haram Al-Sharif in the Holy City, the city of peace — Jerusalem — after the visit to that site of the Israeli opposition leader, Mr. Sharon, accompanied by a group of Likud Knesset members and hundreds of Israeli security personnel and police.

The confrontations provoked by that visit flared up all across the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem. As a result almost 280 people died, most them Palestinians, and many thousands were injured. The Israeli Defence Forces employed excessive and indiscriminate force against Palestinian protesters. The Committee was particularly shocked by the deaths of innocent Palestinian children. At its meeting on 10 October, the Committee voiced its position with regard to these tragic events and adopted a statement on the matter.

Our Committee strongly believes that the events of the past several weeks were a direct result of the policies and practices of the occupation and the failure of Israel to live up to its obligations under the Geneva Convention and to respect the provisions of relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions. The events can also be attributed to the slow pace of progress and real achievements in the negotiations on critical permanent-status issues. It is therefore incumbent on the parties, the co-sponsors of the peace process and other international actors to redress this situation — a situation which threatens to allow disillusionment, despair and frustration to set in and demolish the fragile achievements made in that process.

That fear is precisely the reason why our Committee fervently hoped that implementation of the Sharm el-Sheikh agreements of last September would put an end to the violence and enable the setting up of a fact-finding committee on the basis of Security Council resolution 1322 (2000) in order to restore peace so that the parties can once again return to the negotiating table. We welcomed the determined efforts to revive the peace process made by Presidents Bill Clinton of the United States and Hosni Mubarak of Egypt, as well as by His Majesty King Abdullah of Jordan, Mr. Javier Solana of the European Union and our Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan.

As the Assembly will no doubt recall, both the Security Council and the General Assembly, at its

resumed tenth emergency special session, considered the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, including Jerusalem, and recommended certain measures in that regard. It was particularly important that the Secretary-General briefed the Assembly on his mission to the region and on his extremely useful role as facilitator to bring the parties together.

The experience of the past several months has clearly shown that members of the European Union, Arab States and others of good will can likewise each make their contribution to the efforts to restart peace negotiations.

Our Committee has always maintained that the United Nations should continue to exercise its primary and permanent responsibility towards all aspects of the question of Palestine until it is resolved in a satisfactory manner, in conformity with the relevant resolutions of the Organization and in accordance with international legitimacy, and until the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people are fully realized. That constructive and complementary role of the United Nations and its involvement in the peace process are today more crucial and needed than ever.

The Committee believes that the Organization should remain the guardian of international legitimacy and play a key role in mobilizing international assistance for development, given the importance of such assistance to the peace process. The international community should also stand ready to contribute generously, as permanent-status issues — which include Jerusalem, settlements, refugees and borders — are complex and multidimensional questions that may require outside assistance in order to overcome various obstacles.

In addition to the difficulties the parties have run into in recent months — especially those related to the status and future of the Holy City of Jerusalem — other elements have arisen to complicate the negotiations, among which is the continuing construction of Israeli settlements in and around Jerusalem that is changing the demographic character of the city in an attempt influence the eventual outcome of the talks on the issue.

While acknowledging the need to make progress in the peace negotiations, we should not lose sight of the highly disturbing situation on the ground. Our Committee has observed very closely and with growing alarm all the Israeli settlement activities and the construction of roads throughout the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. The establishment of those settlements remains a principal factor adding to the tension between the parties and hindering the peace process. We are today troubled by the fact that, despite ongoing negotiations, settlement activity is still being pursued at the same pace as in previous years.

The Committee reaffirms in the strongest possible terms that the confiscation of Palestinian land, the demolition of houses and other Palestinian property and the construction of settlements and other illegal building on Palestinian land constitute a serious violation of international law, in particular the Fourth Geneva Convention. Such illegal acts clearly run contrary to the bilateral agreements reached to date and should never predetermine the outcome of final negotiations.

The Committee is also increasingly concerned by the economic hardship suffered by the Palestinian people as a result of Israeli actions. The occupying Power continues to impose arbitrary closures as a means of collective punishment, with severe consequences for Palestinian families. The protracted siege of Palestinian population centres in recent weeks has resulted in a dramatic deterioration of Palestinians' already-precarious living conditions. The losses to the Palestinian economy in terms of its gross domestic product as a result of banning access to Israeli territory in the first month of violence have recently been estimated by the World Bank to be about $210 million. The Bank also stated that this figure could rise to as much as $630 million if the closure continues until the end of the year. Palestinian sources quote much higher figures.

More than 120,000 Palestinians have lost their jobs in Israel. They and their families must now depend on emergency assistance from the World Food Programme, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and other agencies and donors. The Palestinian Authority is no longer able to meet its payroll because of Israel's unilateral decision to withhold funds it should be transferring to the Authority under concluded agreements, such as value-added taxes and customs revenues. Such policies can only result in a further exacerbation of the feelings of frustration and despair of the Palestinian people and

cannot but compound and render even more intractable a situation that is already critical.

Over the decades the international community has demonstrated its readiness to support the struggle of the Palestinian people and their quest for self-determination and independence. Governments, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, and eminent personalities have worked untiringly throughout the world to help the Palestinian people make this noble objective a reality.

Today, at a time when Israeli-Palestinian relations are challenged by many trials and tribulations on the ground, it is absolutely essential that all actors support the peace process and do everything in their power to help the parties through this most difficult phase.

For its part, the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People remains firmly committed to making an effective, construction and concrete contribution to the achievement of this objective through its own programme of work. Since the inception of the Madrid process nine years ago, in 1991, our Committee has endeavoured, through our various mandated activities, to lend support to this peace initiative and promote it worldwide.

The Committee has also worked to promote the exercise by the Palestinian people of their inalienable rights, in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions and international legitimacy, in the framework of a settlement that would ensure the full exercise of all of the rights of the Palestinian people within the context of their legitimate right to self-determination and independence as a sovereign state.

As Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, I wish to draw the Assembly's attention to the four draft resolutions that have been circulated under this item.

Let me first inform the Assembly that Brunei Darussalam, Mali and Oman, as well as other countries, have joined the list of sponsors. We will update that list in due course.

The first three drafts relate, respectively, to the work of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People; the Division for Palestinian Rights; and the Department for Public Information. The drafts reaffirm the important mandates have always been entrusted to these entities.

The draft resolutions focus on promoting the Committee's endeavours in support of the exercise by the Palestinian people of their inalienable rights, in the framework of an equitable solution to the Middle East crisis.

As in the past, the Committee intends to make maximal use of the resources available to it and to concentrate on those activities that have been most effective in the implementation of its mandate. Provision has been made for funding the activities outlined in the three drafts in the programme budget for the 2000-2001 biennium.

The fourth draft, entitled "Peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine", which reflects the position of the General Assembly with regard to the key elements of a settlement, was formulated in the light of the developments of the past year.

The four draft resolutions that I have just introduced give a general outline of the positions, mandates and programmes that are of special importance, particularly at the present stage of the peace process.

I would like to call on the General Assembly to express its full support for these projects in the interests of the peace process, of the Palestinian people and of peace for all in the region.

I should like also to thank the President for his support of the activities of the Committee and for attaching particular importance to the question of a peaceful settlement of the question of the Middle East.

**The President:** I give the floor to Mr. Walter Balzan of Malta, Rapporteur of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, to introduce the Committee's report.

**Mr. Balzan** (Malta), Rapporteur of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People: It is an honour for me, in my capacity as Rapporteur of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, to present to the General Assembly the annual report of the Committee.

In the course of the past year, the Committee continued to carry out the mandate given to it by the General Assembly. The present report covers the developments concerning the question of Palestine, the peace process and the activities of the Committee from

the time of last year's report through 10 October of this year.

The introduction to the report is contained in chapter I and outlines the Committee's objectives and its perspective on the events which have taken place in the course of the year.

Chapters II and III summarize the mandates of the Committee, the Division for Palestinian Rights and the Department of Public Information, and contain information on the organization of the Committee's work in the year under review.

Chapter IV reviews the situation relating to the question of Palestine, as monitored by the Committee during the year. The chapter takes note of a number of encouraging steps taken in implementation of the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum. In particular, it refers to the further redeployment of Israeli troops from parts of the West Bank, the agreement on the release of Palestinian prisoners, the opening of a southern safe passage between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, and the resumption of the negotiations on permanent status issues.

The Committee welcomes the signing, on 7 June 2000, of the Israeli-Palestinian agreement on the implementation of economic issues, as well as the agreement concerning the Gaza seaport, signed on 20 September 2000. The Committee also takes note of the official statement made by the Palestinian Central Council at the conclusion of its session in Gaza, on 9 and 10 September 2000. The chapter reviews the developments on the ground since 28 September 2000 and international efforts to end the escalation of violence in the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem. It makes reference to the action taken by the Security Council in that regard and the adoption by the Council of resolution 1322 (2000).

Also in this chapter, the Committee reviews in some detail the situation on the ground, in particular with regard to Israel's settlement activity, its policy on residency rights of Palestinian Jerusalemites, the situation with respect to Palestinian prisoners, the state of the Palestinian economy, water resources available to the Palestinians, action by the donor community and the United Nations system, and the activities and operational difficulties faced by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

Chapter V reviews the action taken by the Committee. It is divided into two main sections. Section A describes action aimed at promoting Palestinian rights in the United Nations and other intergovernmental bodies. This includes a reference to communications addressed to the President of the Security Council and the Secretary-General. It contains reference to the consideration by the Security Council in October of the agenda item entitled "The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian Question". This section also includes information on the participation by the Committee Chairman in various international forums.

Section B contains an account of the implementation of the programme of work of the Committee and the Division for Palestinian Rights pursuant to General Assembly resolutions 54/39 and 54/40. It contains information on the dialogue between the Committee and members of the European Union. This section also carries a brief account of the various international meetings organized in the course of the year, namely, the United Nations Asian Meeting on the Question of Palestine, held in Hanoi on 1 to 3 March 2000; the International Conference on Palestine Refugees held at the headquarters of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in Paris on 26 and 27 April 2000; the United Nations NGO Meeting on Palestine Refugees, also held at UNESCO headquarters on 28 April 2000; the United Nations International Meeting in Support of a Peaceful Settlement of the Question of Palestine and the Establishment of Peace in the Middle East, held in Athens on 23 and 24 May 2000; and the United Nations Seminar on Prospects for Palestinian Economic Development and the Middle East Peace Process, held in Cairo on 20 and 21 June 2000.

It further reviews the Committee's cooperation with non-governmental organizations; the publications of the Division for Palestinian Rights, the United Nations Information System on the Question of Palestine (UNISPAL) and the project on the modernization of the records of the United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine; the training programme for staff of the Palestinian Authority; and the observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

Section C reflects the action taken in accordance with General Assembly resolution 54/22 of 10 November 1999 on the Bethlehem 2000 project.

Chapter VI contains information on the action taken by the Department of Public Information in accordance with General Assembly resolution 54/41 of 1 December 1999.

The last chapter of the report contains the conclusions and recommendations of the Committee. In this chapter, the Committee expresses its readiness to continue to support the peacemaking efforts of the Israelis and Palestinians, assisted by the sponsors, until peace prevails and the question of Palestine is settled on the basis of justice and international legitimacy.

The Committee welcomes a number of steps made in implementation of earlier Israeli-Palestinian agreements, including the partial release of Palestinian prisoners, the opening of a safe passage between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, the further redeployment of Israeli troops from areas of the West Bank and the signing of the Israeli-Palestinian agreements on economic issues and on the Gaza seaport. It also notes that the important September 2000 meetings held on the sidelines of the Millennium Summit created expectations of a breakthrough in the peace process.

The Committee emphasizes that, more than 50 years after the adoption by the General Assembly of resolution 181 (II) of 29 November 1947, the Palestinian people is yet to see the establishment of its own independent and sovereign State. The Committee reiterates its full support for the exercise by the Palestinian people of its inalienable rights, including the right to self-determination and the establishment of an independent State, and recalls the broad international support for Palestinian statehood.

The Committee refers to the policies and practices of Israel on the ground, including the establishment of settlements. It stresses the need to find a solution to the question of Jerusalem and to the problem of Palestine refugees. The Committee reiterates its position that the United Nations should continue to exercise its permanent responsibility towards all the aspects of the question of Palestine until it is resolved in a satisfactory manner, in conformity with relevant United Nations resolutions and in accordance with international legitimacy, and until the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people are fully realized. It expresses the view that the important work carried out by UNRWA should be continued. The Committee also supports the view that the reactivation of the work of the United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine, established by the General Assembly in its resolution 194 (III) of 11 December 1948, and the use of the records of the Commission related to land ownership in Palestine should be considered.

The Committee states that it will continue to review and assess its programme of activities with a view to making it more focused and responsive to developments in the peace process and on the ground.

The Committee indicates its intention to continue to promote the Bethlehem 2000 Project of the Palestinian Authority and draws the attention of the international community to the urgency of providing varied assistance to many other Palestinian municipalities throughout the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

The Committee recognizes the essential contribution of the Division for Palestinian Rights of the Secretariat in support of the Committee's objectives and requests it to continue its programme of publications and other informational activities, including the updating of UNISPAL and the completion of work on its collection of documents hitherto unavailable in machine-readable form.

The Committee notes that the special information programme on the question of Palestine of the Department of Public Information remains an important and useful tool in informing the media and public opinion on issues relating to the question of Palestine. The Committee also considers that the programme should be continued with the necessary flexibility, as required by developments affecting the question of Palestine.

Finally, in an effort to make its contribution to the achievement of a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine, the Committee calls on all States to join in this endeavour and invites the General Assembly again to recognize the importance of its role and to reconfirm its mandate with overwhelming support.

I trust that the report I have just introduced will be of assistance to the General Assembly in facilitating its deliberations on this important issue.

**Mr. Kaddoumi** (Palestine) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to congratulate Mr. Holkeri on his election as President of this session of the General

Assembly. I can only commend the positions of his friendly country, Finland. We are confident that his ability and wisdom will bring success to our session. We highly appreciate the efforts made by his predecessor, Mr. Theo-Ben Gurirab, who struggled in this same General Assembly for the achievement of Namibia's independence. I would also like to express our appreciation and thanks to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Kofi Annan, for all the efforts he has deployed for the realization of the objectives of the Organization.

We have considered the report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, and we would like to thank the Committee and its Chairman, Mr. Ibra Deguène Ka, for all their efforts to promote the rights of the Palestinian people.

Once again today, we are considering the question of Palestine, which has remained on the agenda of the General Assembly for over half a century. The United Nations is the organization that took the decision on the partition of Palestine, thereby creating the most difficult political and security problem in the Middle East. Since the adoption of that resolution, the region has witnessed many conflicts and wars that have, regrettably, caused the dispersion of millions of Palestinians, the original inhabitants of the country.

At a time when we were calling for an end to the British mandate and for the establishment of a democratic State in Palestine, we accepted coexistence with the Jewish foreigners who had systematically immigrated to Palestine before the Second World War. We had hoped that this small piece of sacred land, respected and glorified by the three divine religions, would not be partitioned.

We had hoped to avoid the eruption of the conflicts that were destined to become a permanent concern to mankind. However, the ambitions of the Zionist movement, the conspiracy of old colonialism and the interests of certain large States caused the continuation of wars and conflicts between the Arabs and Israel. To make things worse, the Soviet Union opened its doors to Jewish immigration to Israel in the late 1980s.

Because of that Jewish immigration, the Middle East region witnessed five wars. In the wake of each of these five wars, the United States took a certain political initiative. This continued until 1991, when former United States President George Bush, following the second Gulf War, took a new political initiative, one that was accepted by the parties concerned. Public opinion believed that this augured a new era in which security and stability would be established in the Middle East region. This initiative was taken on the basis of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), and on the principle of land for peace, with a view to guaranteeing the security of the States of the region and the legitimate political rights of the Palestinian people, on the basis of which the Madrid Peace Conference was held in October 1991.

Great hopes were pinned on negotiations in Washington between the Arabs and Israel, but two years passed without any tangible progress on the different issues due to the intransigence of former Israeli Prime Minister Shamir, who declared that he intended to spend 10 years in futile negotiations that would yield no results. He was followed by Mr. Yitzhak Rabin and the Oslo Declaration of Principles in 1993, with a view to implementing Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). Only at this point was there some progress towards a political settlement, thanks to the flexibility shown by the Palestinian side and the response of Mr. Yitzhak Rabin, who was assassinated by an Israeli fanatic in 1995. The assassination of Mr. Rabin was a true shock to international public opinion.

Peres came to power then Netanyahu, who thwarted any hopes of a settlement. Netanyahu started with his extreme racist practices and declarations that threatened more dangers. He repeated at times that the Oslo Accords implied further dangers to Israeli security and that there was still a need for other agreements that would bring peace and security to Israeli society. He insisted, in extreme intransigence, on renegotiating all the agreements signed by previous officials. He wasted months and even years in futile meetings at the highest level, under the sponsorship of President Clinton and his Secretary of State, Mrs. Madeleine Albright. In spite of the futility of these negotiations, the Palestinian side responded to the appeals of international public opinion to continue the negotiations to avoid their failure and to negate all the pretexts made by Netanyahu to hinder the negotiations.

The process of political settlement in the Netanyahu era was struck with paralysis. Political instability was created by the Israelis in Jerusalem in

September 1996, when they started digging a tunnel under Al-Haram Al-Sharif, leading to bloody confrontations in which dozens of martyrs fell. The Security Council condemned Israeli actions in this regard by adopting resolution 1073 (1996).

The Palestinian side responded to the request for security agreements between the Palestinians and Israelis with United States participation. The Palestinians were also called to meet with the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, Mr. Tony Blair, in London in December 1997, but Mr. Netanyahu refused to participate. Then President Clinton invited President Arafat and Mr. Netanyahu to a meeting in January 1998. At that time Mr. Netanyahu came to Washington armed with resolutions that had been adopted by the Israeli Government on 15 January 1998. These resolutions stipulated vital Israeli national interests that, from the Israeli point of view, could not be renounced in either an interim or a permanent agreement.

Those vital Israeli interests are the following. First, the eastern security zone along the Jordan River. This zone is 80 kilometres long and 16 kilometres wide. Secondly, the western security areas, four to six kilometres wide. Thirdly, all the Israeli settlements in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, 185 settlements, the routes connecting these settlements and all the infrastructure, including electricity, water and transportation. Fourthly, the sacred Jewish sites, including greater Jerusalem, and all the roads and highways linking them. As a result, nothing was left for the Palestinians.

After repeated attempts, President Clinton was able to convince the two parties, the Palestinians and the Israelis, to attend a summit meeting at the Wye Plantation. At this meeting Israel was to announce its willingness to redeploy its army within only 13 per cent of the Palestinian territories. Nonetheless, Mr. Netanyahu only agreed to implement that agreement partially, then he declared that general elections would be held in Israel within seven months.

In June 1999 Netanhayu was succeeded by Mr. Barak, who has now declared once again that general elections would be held. This is a game of continual elections.

President Clinton wrote to President Arafat on 26 April 1999:

*(spoke in English)*

> "I know that your people have faced great difficulties in the past several years. Clearly the Oslo process has not made the kind of progress we would have hoped to see. Much time has been wasted and many opportunities have been lost. ... The Palestinians have implemented many of their commitments for the second phase, and I appreciate your efforts, particularly in the security area where Palestinians are engaged in a serious effort to fight terror. ... We will continue to work actively for implementation by Israel."

So Israel did not implement its commitments; this is certified by the President of the United States.

In his letter he continued:

> "In this context, and in the spirit of my remarks in Gaza, we support the aspirations of the Palestinian people to determine their own future on their own land. As I said in Gaza, I believe Palestinians should live free today, tomorrow and forever. ...
>
> "The United States further believes that the Oslo process was never intended to be open-ended."

It was decided that it would be five years. Seven years have already passed.

*(spoke in Arabic)*

Mr. Netanyahu was followed by Mr. Barak in June 1999. Mr. Barak is well known for his hatred of the Arabs and for having committed crimes against the Palestinian leadership. He came to power with five no's, which are not very different from those of Mr. Netanyahu. No to the return of the Palestinian refugees. No to a divided Jerusalem; under Israeli authority, a unified Jerusalem, will be the eternal capital of the Jewish people. No withdrawal to the borders of 4 June 1967. No foreign armies west of the Jordan River. No dismantling of the Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

On a day in May 1999 the scheduled period for negotiations came to an end and the Palestinian Authority was supposed to declare the establishment of a Palestinian independent State on Palestinian territories. But the United States and friendly European countries advised postponing this declaration and extending the negotiations for a sixth year. The

Palestinian Authority responded positively, and negotiations continued for many months without any progress. What is worse is that Mr. Barak ordered the Israeli army to launch a wanton attack against brotherly Lebanon in March 2000. This led to an escalation of tensions in the region and paralysed the peace process for a long time.

After continued American efforts, political negotiations between the Palestinians and the Israelis were resumed and a tripartite summit was held at Camp David in an attempt to save the peace process as the end of President Clinton's tenure approached. These negotiations lasted for two weeks, but they failed because Israel insisted on total sovereignty over Jerusalem, including over Christian and Islamic sacred sites. Israel claimed that the Al-Aqsa Mosque was built on the ruins of the Temple Mount which was destroyed 2,000 years ago by the Roman emperor Titus.

The Israeli authorities did this knowing that a great archaeologist at the University of Tel Aviv said that after 70 years of extensive digging in Israel, scientists had concluded that there was absolutely no evidence for this claim and that the stories told by the Jewish forefathers were only myths. The archaeologist went on to say that the unified kingdom of David and Solomon, which is described in the Torah as a great State of the region, was at best a small tribal kingdom.

After instability in 1929 that concerned the Western Wall of Al-Haram Al-Sharif — the Wailing Wall — the British mandate Government established the Shaw Commission of Enquiry. It worked for two years and submitted its recommendations to the Privy Council, which issued a decree on 19 May 1931. This decree declared that the Muslims and none other have absolute ownership of the Western Wall, the Wailing Wall.

*(spoke in English)*

I should like to quote from the Privy Council Palestine (Western or Wailing Wall) Order, issued on 19 May 1931:

> "To Moslems belong the sole ownership of, and the sole proprietary right to, the Western Wall, seeing that it forms an integral part of the Haram-esh-Sherif area, which is a Waqf property.
>
> "To the Moslems there also belongs the ownership of the pavement in front of the Wall and of the adjacent so-called Moghrabi (Moroccan) quarter opposite the Wall, inasmuch as the last-mentioned property was made Waqf under Moslem Sharia law, it being dedicated to charitable purposes.
>
> "Such appurtenances of worship and/or such other objects as the Jews may be entitled to place near the Wall either in conformity with the provisions of this present verdict or by agreement come to between the parties, shall under no circumstances be considered as, or have the effect of, establishing them any sort of propriety right to the Wall or to the adjacent pavement. (*schedule I, section A*)
>
> "The Jews shall have free access to the Western Wall". (*ibid., section B*)

Again, this comes from the Privy Council Order and means that the Wall is for the Muslims.

*(spoke in Arabic)*

As is known, the European Union has repeatedly informed Israel that it rejects its claims that unified Jerusalem is the eternal capital of Israel. This was conveyed in a letter to Mr. Sharon from Mr. Fischer in the month of March.

In addition, during the Camp David summit Mr. Barak requested that 10 per cent of Palestinian territory be annexed to Israel. He also insisted that most Israeli settlements remain under Israeli authority and called for the establishment of monitoring stations on Palestinian territory and military bases on the western bank of the River Jordan. He also called for crossing points between Palestine and Israel to remain under Israel's authority, although he knows full well that Security Council resolution 242 (1967) requires Israel's full withdrawal from all territories occupied in 1967, including Jerusalem. Moreover, resolution 465 (1980), which was adopted unanimously, requires Israel to dismantle all its settlements, while resolution 478 (1980) found null and void Israeli laws aimed at altering the status or character of Jerusalem.

That raises the question of whether Israel's membership in the United Nations is legitimate as long as it repeatedly rejects or fails to respect the resolutions of the Security Council and violates the principles of the Organization and Article 25 of the Charter. It also raises the question of Iraq, a country under siege because of the implementation of Security Council resolutions. Iraq suffers under sanctions, while Israel

receives support and is protected by a veto. This is indeed a double standard. Although Israel has agreed to the establishment of an Arab-Palestinian State, it wants that State to exist without rights or sovereignty. Israel knows full well that it committed itself to General Assembly resolution 181 (II) when it was admitted as a Member State of the United Nations. That resolution called for the establishment of two States, one Arab-Palestinian and the other Jewish.

The failure of the Camp David summit led to an escalation of tension in occupied Palestinian territories, particularly after Mr. Sharon's violation of the sanctity of Al-Quds Al-Sharif on 28 September 2000 while under the protection of 3,000 Israeli police and army officers. On Friday, 29 September, Israeli police and army troops broke into Al-Quds Al-Sharif and fired at worshipers, killing seven and injuring dozens, thereby leading to the Palestinian intifada that erupted in protest of the criminal actions of Israel, a country that claims to be a democracy.

It is clear that those criminal acts had been planned by Mr. Barak to provoke the Palestinian people. Israel's military Chief of Staff, Mr. Shaul Mofaz, had declared many months before that the second half of the year would see very bloody events in which the Israeli army would employ heavy weapons — including tanks and helicopter gunships — to prevent Palestinians from protesting events on their own territory. Those troops arbitrarily shot at unarmed Palestinian citizens in order to kill them. Israeli tanks besieged Palestinian towns, sealed off their entrances and shot at countless demonstrators. That led to the killing of more than 300 martyrs and injuries to thousands, many of them left permanently maimed.

Israel also put in place many harsh measures, including the imposition of an economic and military blockade against the Palestinian people. It also prohibited the movement of persons between towns and stopped the delivery of food and medical provisions. Furthermore, Israeli settlers confiscated Palestinian olive harvests and uprooted 40,000 olive trees. Electricity and water supplies were cut; oil imports were halted; and the payment of tax revenues to the Palestinian Authority was suspended.

All this has led to high unemployment. Our economic losses have reached $900 million due to Israel's actions and the deterioration of the security situation. On 1 November 2000, Amira Hass said in *Ha'aretz* that the new intifada is only the latest attempt by Palestinians to hold up a mirror before Israelis to make them see their racism, arbitrariness and brutality. It shows that Palestinians will not accept coexistence without equality, as the Jews had thought. The article asks if it is normal to close for over a month 34 schools attended by thousands of Palestinian students, saying that those children are cooped up in their already crowded houses while the children of their Jewish neighbours play in the street among and with soldiers.

Hasty contacts were made between Presidents Mohamed Hosni Mubarak and Bill Clinton to stop Israel's acts of aggression and to bring about the withdrawal of Israeli forces besieging Palestinian towns. The result was the holding of the Sharm El-Sheikh summit on 16 October. That meeting was attended by the Secretary-General, His Majesty King Abdullah II and, on behalf of the European Union, Mr. Javier Solana.

An agreement was reached at Sharm El-Sheikh to establish a committee of inquiry. On 7 October, the Security Council adopted resolution 1322 (2000), and the General Assembly met in emergency special session on 20 October to adopt a resolution calling for the provision of adequate protection for Palestinians under occupation and condemning Israel's aggression and excessive violence against Palestinian civilians.

The United Nations has the full and permanent responsibility to provide adequate protection for the Palestinian people. In that context, we believe that a meeting of the parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention should be called to establish a mechanism to provide that protection. Such an arrangement should have both the responsibility and the authority to protect Palestinians. That protection should not take the form of merely sending observers or a small international presence such as the one previously deployed in Al-Khalil. It is also the Security Council's responsibility to authorize the Secretary-General to put together such a force.

November 29 coincides with the fifty-second anniversary of the adoption of resolution 181 (II), which partitioned Palestine into two states — one Arab Palestinian and one Jewish — and used it as a condition for the acceptance of either entity in the membership of the United Nations. The General Assembly accepted the membership of Israel, which has not fulfilled that condition. The Palestinian people

are now asking for membership, as the Palestinian National Council has accepted resolution 181 (II).

We deeply appreciate the position of the European Union, reaffirmed on 15 November 2000, on the need to establish a viable, democratic and peaceful Palestinian state. This would represent the best guarantee for the security of Israel, enabling it to live like all of the other States in the region — protecting itself while participating in efforts towards peace, security and stability.

This failure on the part of the Israelis is the natural result of political rivalry among Israeli political parties. That rivalry cost Yitzhak Rabin his life and produced a psychological state of mind in Israeli society that causes it to be overly concerned about security, despite the fact that a political settlement would provide Israel, and all the Arab parties, with the elements of peace and security.

Many Arab countries had begun to normalize their relations with Israel following the signing of the Oslo agreements and peace treaties with Egypt and Jordan. The Palestinians have proved their good intentions and their desire to establish peace and peaceful coexistence with the Israelis. They have shown the flexibility that was demanded by the West and adopted political positions that were received with acceptance by European countries and the United States, in contradiction to the intransigence of the Israeli positions.

French President Jacques Chirac and the United Kingdom Prime Minister visited our territories and expressed their satisfaction with the peace process.

President Clinton wrote to President Arafat, saying:

*(spoke in English)*

> "As May 4 approaches, I also understand that you face enormous pressures and challenges in trying to realize your destiny and aspirations and keep hopes for peace alive. In your effort to deal with these challenges, I am asking that you continue to rely on the peace process as a way to fulfil the aspirations of your people. Indeed, negotiations are the only realistic way to fulfil those aspirations. In this context, and in the spirit of my remarks in Gaza, I believe the Palestinians should live free, today, tomorrow and forever."

*(spoke in Arabic)*

Despite all of these indications of the success of the peace process, which was fraught with prevarication and lack of commitment on the part of the Israelis, the Palestinian people continued to hope for a peaceful solution. But Zionist extremists, with their racist ideas and hatred for the Arabs, called us snakes, starting with Rabbi Ovadiah Yosef, the President of the Shas Party, and Mr. Barak, who called us crocodiles. Despite all this, we ignored all name-calling, cleansing our hearts of hatred and anger in order to establish peace on the basis of justice and equality in the Middle East.

We wonder what the reason is for the vicious attack by the Israeli army against the Palestinian people and its besieging of our towns. If the Israeli authorities think they can force us to make any more concessions or to take positions that are not humanitarian, they are wrong. It is impossible for us to act in such a way, despite the loss of scores of martyrs who were defending their holy sites, national rights and human rights.

But daily Israeli practices prove beyond the shadow of a doubt that Israel is a racist State. Israeli police forces and its army fired on Israeli Arabs, killing 14 and wounding dozens. If those demonstrators had been Jews, not a single bullet would have been fired against them. On the contrary, they would have been protected.

Things did not stop there. Israel intensified the process of the establishment of settlements on Palestinian territories, whose number has reached 185 and in which 270,000 Jewish immigrants live. Successive Israeli Governments provided them with weapons with a view to enabling them to terrorize and attack the inhabitants of peaceful Palestinian villages, in order to continue their occupation of our territories.

Mr. Barak, the apprentice of Mr. Rabin, forgot that his mentor failed to abort the first intifada. He had called for breaking the bones of all Palestinians and wished for the sea to swallow struggling Gaza. But in the end, he chose, with the help of Mr. Peres, a political solution leading to the Oslo agreement. Why will he not take heed of the lessons of history instead of prevaricating and wheeling and dealing in his positions, through which he is attempting to prove to Israeli society and to Zionist extremists that he wants

only to protect them and to maintain the settlements? Instead, Barak responds to his Israeli critics by saying:

> "Send those critics and those who complain to Ramallah and Gaza for a few days. Then they will realize that the party that pays the highest price in these confrontations is the Palestinian party."

We ask the Assembly here and now to dispatch an international fact-finding committee to investigate firsthand these criminal Israeli actions, so that a decision can be taken immediately to dispatch international emergency forces to the Palestinian territories to protect the Palestinian people from this war of extinction.

**Mr. Samhan** (United Arab Emirates) *(spoke in Arabic)*: I should like to extend my thanks and gratitude to Ambassador Ibra Deguène Ka, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, and to the members of the Committee, for his valuable report and for the statement he has just made, which reflected very clearly the gravity of the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories and the latest developments therein, as Israel continues to violate the most fundamental principles of international humanitarian law.

On the occasion of the commemoration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, the Government and people of the United Arab Emirates reaffirms its continual support for, and solidarity with, the brotherly Palestinian people in their just struggle to bring about their legitimate aspirations to self-determination, like other peoples of the world.

The United Nations has lived with this issue for 52 years. The political, historical and legal roots of the Palestinian question, which is at the heart of the Arab-Israeli conflict, lie in the adoption of General Assembly resolution 181 (II) of 1947 on the partition of Palestine into two States — one Palestinian and one Israeli — and in subsequent relevant resolutions essentially affirming the rights of the Palestinian people to establish their independent State, with its capital in Jerusalem, and of refugees to return to their homeland in Palestine, as well as the elimination of all Israeli colonialist settlements. Despite all these international resolutions and the bilateral accords signed by the Palestinians and the Israelis, Israel continues to violate the resolutions of international legitimacy, thus challenging the will of the international community, which has ceaselessly striven to ensure a just, lasting and comprehensive settlement of the Palestinian question and the situation in the Middle East.

The holy Al-Aqsa intifada has entered its third month and Israel continues to perpetrate crimes of genocide and armed aggression, to destroy houses, property and the infrastructure of Palestinian economic and social institutions and to pursue such measures as illegal imprisonment, coercive detention, laying siege, preventing communications between towns and cities and totally isolating the occupied Palestinian territory from the outside world. It is also preventing the delivery of food and necessary medical supplies to the Palestinian people, flouting international humanitarian norms and principles. We therefore urge the international community to provide economic, financial and humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian people in order to overcome such difficulties.

Anyone who has followed all these tragic incidents and events will clearly perceive the true intention of the Israeli Government to consolidate its occupation of Palestinian territory. The latest international reports have emphasized the fact that Israel continues to build settlements, particularly in the city of Al-Quds Al-Sharif, in order to change its demographic, historic and religious character and to establish new faits accomplis of the occupation. It does so despite the many relevant international resolutions, in particular Security Council 1322 (2000) and the most recent resolution adopted at the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly, which call on Israel, the occupying Power, immediately to cease all its hostile activities against the Palestinian people.

The Israeli Government, however, continues to ignore its legal, political and moral obligations. It persists in promoting its illegal settlement policies in the occupied Palestinian territories, including the city of Al-Quds Al-Sharif, in the most serious violation of international law, United Nations resolutions, in particular Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), and the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, which guarantees the protection of civilians and their property in times of war.

*Mr. Ling (Belarus), Vice-President, took the Chair.*

The United Arab Emirates has condemned all these illegal Israeli violations, particularly in the city of Al-Quds Al-Sharif, which are the direct cause of the

breakdown and stalemate in the peace process. We reaffirm once again the responsibility of the United Nations, the Security Council in particular, for the implementation of its own resolutions on the establishment of an independent Palestinian State, with its capital in Al-Quds Al-Sharif. If we are to address the most serious current events in the occupied Palestinian territories, we must stop using double standards and we must take urgent and immediate steps to contain this increasingly inhumane situation by providing necessary international protection for the Palestinian people in all the Arab territories occupied since 1967. Furthermore, we must try Israeli war criminals for the murder of hundreds of Palestinian martyrs and the injury of thousands more, just as we try war criminals elsewhere in the world.

The Security Council has previously adopted resolutions leading to the dispatch of international forces — to East Timor, for instance, and elsewhere. The Council's failure to take similar measures for the protection of the Palestinian people would be a flagrant inconsistency and would highlight the use of double standards by some of its permanent members in dealing with the question of Palestine and the situation in the Middle East.

History will record this injustice. Must we understand from this that the Palestinian people, which have contributed to human civilization in all its forms in ancient and modern times, does not belong to the family of nations of this world? If the international community, the Security Council in particular, had stood up to such crimes, the Israeli authorities would have been unable to continue violating the rights of the Palestinian people.

In conclusion, we wish to affirm that a just, lasting and comprehensive settlement of the question of Palestine and the situation in the Middle East cannot be achieved unless the sponsors of the peace process, especially the United States and the members of the European Union, prevail upon Israel to withdraw fully and unconditionally from all Arab and Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, including Al-Quds Al-Sharif, the Syrian Golan and the Lebanese Sheba'a farmlands, and to allow the full return of Palestinian refugees to their homeland and the establishment of the independent State of Palestine, with its capital in Al-Quds Al-Sharif. Israel must also eliminate and outlaw its weapons of mass destruction, particularly its nuclear weapons, in the context of the resolutions of international legitimacy and on basis of the principle of land for peace and all the Palestinian-Israeli accords, which Israel has deliberately violated.

This region, which is very important strategically and economically to the international community, will continue to experience deterioration and instability, which will in turn affect international and regional peace and security.

**Mr. Wang Yingfan** (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): The question of the Middle East has been one of the world's longest-standing hot-spot issues. Despite some progress in the Middle East peace process, the peace negotiations between Palestine and Israel have experienced many twists and turns and millions of Palestinian refugees, who have suffered so much for so long under the endless scourge of war and violence, remain displaced and unable to return to their homeland.

Although the Palestinians have achieved self-government in parts of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank of the River Jordan, they still face great difficulties in terms of economic development and people's livelihood. Their suffering has focused the attention of the international community and generated widespread sympathy. More recently, the violence rekindled between Israel and Palestine at the end of last September has caused enormous losses of Palestinian lives and property.

This new round of Israeli-Palestinian conflict has seriously disrupted the Middle East peace process, plunging the whole region into volatility and instability. The Chinese Government is deeply concerned over this. We oppose the use of force by the Israeli authorities against innocent civilians and therefore have voted in favour of relevant resolutions concerning the latest developments in the Middle East in the Security Council, in the resumed tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly, in the Economic and Social Council and in the United Nations Commission on Human Rights in Geneva. The Chinese Red Cross Society has already provided emergency humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian people, and civil society in China has also extended its support and conveyed sympathy to Palestinian people in various forms.

The facts have fully demonstrated that the question of Palestine is at the core of the Middle East issue. Without a real solution to the Palestinian

question there is no way to root out violence in the Middle East. Violence will only serve to deepen mutual hatred, while negotiation and dialogue will bring hope and peace. Achieving a political resolution of the Palestinian question through negotiation and dialogue is not only in the fundamental interest of the people of all countries in the Middle East, but is also conducive to peace and stability in the region and in the world at large. We believe that the legitimate national rights of the Palestinian people, including their right to statehood, should be restored, and the international community has the obligation and the responsibility to render the necessary help to the Palestinians in this regard.

I wish to reiterate that China supports the Middle East peace process and has always maintained that Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) on the Middle East, as well as the principle of land for peace, constitute the basis for Middle East peace negotiations. Both the Arab side and the Israeli side should try to resolve their differences through earnest and practical negotiations and move the peace process forward on the basis of the implementation of the existing agreements between them. We firmly support the just cause of the Palestinian people to restore their legitimate national rights and oppose Israel's unjustifiable resort to force or threat of the use of force and the practice of bullying the weaker and smaller.

For the time being, it is of the utmost importance to stop the violence between Palestine and Israel. In this regard, we support all positive efforts made by concerned countries and Secretary-General Kofi Annan. The Chinese Government will continue to make its contribution to the cessation of the violence and the promotion of the peace process in the Middle East.

**Mr. Mwakawago** (United Republic of Tanzania): In our statement on this agenda item at the fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly, last year, my delegation expressed its hope that with the advent of the new millennium, the question of Palestine would take a turn for the better. This optimism was based on the promising progress that had been made in the peace process, aimed at finding a lasting solution to the Palestinian question.

As we speak today, we deeply regret that the situation in the Palestinian territories has taken a tragic turn for the worse. Not only has the peace process ground to a halt, but the current situation is even threatening to reverse the achievements of the last few years. It is not far-fetched to assume that in a volatile region this could endanger international peace and security.

Like others who have spoken before us, we deeply deplore the recent tragic events in that area resulting in the deaths of many and injuries to thousands of innocent people. We offer our sincere condolences to the bereaved families. My delegation strongly deplores the provocative acts that ignited the unfortunate events. We also deplore the use of excessive and disproportionate force by the Israeli army. There can be no justification for the use of tanks, helicopter gunships and missiles against stone-throwing protesters. Surely there must be other ways of restraining such demonstrators.

Israel's use of such deadly military force against Palestinian civilians is inexcusable and can only lead to more violence. Furthermore, we strongly oppose the collective punishment meted out against the Palestinian civilian population by the Israeli authorities. Such measures have a tendency to fuel anger and resentment and thus exacerbate the situation. We appeal for wiser counsel to prevail. There must be restraint all around, for we believe that there is no military solution to the conflict. Negotiations are the only way out. However, these have to take place on the basis of equity, justice and fairness. In this regard, my delegation would like to express its deep appreciation for the continuing efforts of the Secretary-General and others to encourage a resolution of the Middle East conflict through peaceful means.

A comprehensive settlement of the present conflict can be achieved only by granting the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including the right to independence and to their own independent State. In the context of the present circumstances, we fully support the expeditious implementation of Security Council resolution 1322 (2000), which, among other things, calls for the establishment of an international inquiry into the tragic events in the region with the aim of preventing their repetition. In the same vein, we support the call for the deployment of a United Nations observer force in the area. We believe that such measures would go a long way towards easing the situation and ensuring the safety and lives of the Palestinian people.

In conclusion, my delegation calls for an immediate cessation of violence and calls on both parties — Palestine and Israel — to move towards the resumption of peaceful negotiations as soon as possible. We firmly believe that peaceful negotiation is the only effective means of ensuring a lasting solution to the conflict and thus guaranteeing lasting peace, security and stability in the region. Peace should be given a chance. It is imperative to realize that the preponderance of force will not deliver peace or ensure a conducive climate for negotiations.

**Mr. Kumalo** (South Africa): South Africa has been a member of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People since 1977. Upon becoming a member we, stated to the Committee,

> "The struggles and sacrifices of our people against apartheid could not but inspire us to support the fight of the Palestinian people for self-determination and the establishment of an independent State."

We are convinced that the Committee, under the able leadership of Ambassador Ibra Ka of Senegal, functioning as an organ established by the Assembly to deal with the question of Palestine, continues to have an important role during this crucial period.

In collaboration with the United Nations Division for Palestinian Rights and the Department of Public Information, the Committee serves to increase international awareness of the question of Palestine.

At this critical juncture for the Palestinian people, the continued support of the United Nations and its organizations and agencies cannot be underestimated.

South Africa supports the struggle of the Palestinian people. We firmly believe that the achievement of their inalienable rights to self-determination and independence is pivotal for the achievement of a sustained and comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

This morning, the United Nations commemorated the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. Allow me to quote from the message of President Thabo Mbeki, Chairman the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM):

> "It is inexcusable that, more than 50 years after the United Nations affirmed the right of Palestinians to sovereign statehood and more than 30 years after the Security Council, in a binding decision, called on Israel to withdraw from all the Arab territories that it had occupied in the war of June 1967, the suffering and humiliation of foreign military occupation still continue." *(A/AC.183/PV.255)*

Meeting at the Millennium Assembly, the NAM ministers reiterated that a just and comprehensive peace can be achieved only by upholding international legitimacy and relevant United Nations resolutions. They resolved to actively strive towards the achievement of a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East on the basis of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and the principle of land for peace. Moreover, they reaffirmed the right of the Palestinian people to establish their independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

We welcome the report of the Committee, contained in document A/55/35, submitted to this session of the Assembly. One of the important functions of the Committee is to provide a forum for discussion for Governments and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations. South Africa had the opportunity to participate as Chair of the Non-Aligned Movement at the important international conferences held under the auspices of the Committee this year.

The recent United Nations international conference in Paris drew attention to the desperate plight of Palestinian refugees as a result of displacement. The Non-Aligned Movement has repeatedly called for the implementation of all United Nations resolutions related to Palestinian refugees. We emphasize that resolution 194 (III) of 1948 must constitute the basis for a just resolution of the refugee question.

The United Nations International Meeting in Support of a Peaceful Settlement of the Question of Palestine and the Establishment of Peace in the Middle East was held in Athens this year. The Non-Aligned Movement Chair reiterated the Movement's position on the need for Member States to respect the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their 1977 Additional Protocols. In this regard, NAM has called on Israel to halt all settlement-related activity and other illegal activities in the occupied territories and to cease actions which exacerbate the suffering of the Palestinian people.

These acts constitute an illegal attempt to change the physical character, legal status and demographic composition of the occupied territories, in direct violation of the agreements reached between the Palestine Liberation Organization and Israel and in direct violation of international law.

We firmly believe that peaceful negotiation is the only means of ensuring lasting peace, security and stability in the region. We welcome the important role of the Secretary-General in the efforts for a peaceful resolution of the question of Palestine, the nucleus of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Endorsing the draft resolutions that are before the Assembly would send a clear message that, until a definitive solution is reached for the Palestinian people, the United Nations will remain fully engaged on the question of Palestine.

**Mr. Al-Sindi** (Yemen) *(spoke in Arabic)*: Following the adoption of resolution 181 (II) (1947), which provides for the partition of Palestine into two States, one a Palestinian Islamic and Christian State and the other a Jewish State, only the State of Israel was established, while the people of Palestine were, and still are, displaced from their homeland. Since that day, particularly since the adoption of resolution 32/40 B, the representatives of the international community have expressed their solidarity with the Palestinian people through the International Day of Solidarity.

During its forty-third session, the Assembly recognized the proclamation of the State of Palestine and affirmed the need of the Palestinian people to exercise its sovereignty over the territory occupied since 1967. We believed that this would end the violence, killing and occupation and would bring about a just and comprehensive settlement of the question of Palestine in accordance with the resolutions of international legitimacy.

Regrettably, the occupation continued, the aggressive practices doubled and the displacement continued until the call came for the holding of the Madrid Conference, followed by the Oslo Accords. We thought this would mark the beginning of the negotiations on the peace process in the Middle East under the sponsorship of the United States and the Russian Federation.

The peoples of the area welcomed these developments because of their desire to bring about stability and to live in peace.

All these endeavours, including the personal role assumed by President Clinton, starting with the Wye River summit and continuing at Camp David and Washington and the Sharm El-Sheikh summit, which was held under the sponsorship of President Hosni Mubarak, King Abdullah, President Clinton and Secretary-General Kofi Annan, have not led to an agreement because of Israel's continual rejection of an agreement. The ongoing violations against the Holy City and its people — which escalated into the Al-Quds Al-Sharif massacre as a result of the provocative visit of Ariel Sharon and the hostile, inflammatory statements of Israeli officials regarding Jerusalem, such as the declaration of the intention to rebuild the Temple on the ruins of the holy Al-Aqsa Mosque — have led to the explosion of a popular uprising rejecting calls for an end to the Arab, Islamic and Christian identity of Palestine.

The Middle East peace process is currently in a serious dilemma because of the military actions of the Israeli occupying Power and its use of all types of weapons. Because of scientific innovations and developments, information technology and television satellite transmission, the world sees, hears and lives the bloody, aggressive acts against and the ongoing killing of everything Palestinian. The killing of the child Mohammed Al-Durra in his father's arms is a case in point.

The aggression has reached its peak. Instead of the occupying Power working to fulfil the calls made by Mrs. Mary Robinson, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, to stop violence, the Israeli State continues to incite the Israeli settlers implanted in the heart of the occupied Arab territories to threaten her, to stop her mounted escort for a time and to prevent her from assuming her responsibilities in keeping with her programme, thus impeding the work of this very important international figure. Her recently issued report represents sufficient condemnation of the Israeli occupying force, as she called for the deployment of international observers, for stopping the use of force, for dismantling Israeli settlements and for protecting the Palestinians from settler violence.

Nonetheless, the Israeli occupation force has gone to even greater extremes using internationally prohibited munitions in its brutal attacks against the Palestinian people on the evening of 20 November 2000, in addition to the siege and closing of border

passages, the burning of farms, prevention of workers' freedom of movement and the killing of the elderly, youths, women and children. To date, there have been more than 300 killed and more than 11,000 injured in a period of little more than two months. This is all because the Palestinian people have sought their inalienable natural and historical right to establish their independent State, with Jerusalem as its capital.

Finally, the international community, particularly the permanent members of the Security Council, are called upon today, more than ever before, to intervene in an impartial manner to halt the Israeli campaigns against the unarmed Palestinian people, to provide international protection, in accordance with the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, of 12 August 1949, to send a fact-finding committee soon and to effect the immediate withdrawal of Israeli forces and settlers from the Arab territories occupied since 1967, including Jerusalem, the capital of the State of Palestine.

**Mr. Buallay** (Bahrain) (*spoke in Arabic*): Our hopes were revived when peace agreements between the Palestinian and Israeli parties were signed in 1993 in Washington. We had hoped that the Palestinian people would finally be able to regain their territories usurped by Israel. We had hoped that they would be able to establish their independent State, with Jerusalem as its capital, and that the Middle East region would live in peace and security, which have been absent since the establishment of the so-called State of Israel in 1948.

Since these agreements were signed in 1993, events have once again demonstrated that the Middle East peace process is subject to fluctuations and political developments in the region. It is noteworthy that this is due to a large extent to the repeated changes of Israeli Governments that are responsible for the implementation of those agreements. Every Israeli Government in authority has taken steps backwards, reneging on almost all the commitments of the previous Government. It has become very clear to everyone that successive Israeli Governments either do not want to continue the peace process or want to impose peace through their own high-handed approach and in total disregard of anything that is not Israeli.

It has become clear that the Palestinian people have grown sick and tired of that, and have taken the initiative and started their intifada. The Palestinian people may have an excuse because Israel has adopted a policy of taking and not giving. It hesitates when it comes to withdrawing from the occupied territories, contradicting the peace agreements signed in Washington. It intensifies the establishment of settlements, rejects the return of refugees and is intransigent on the matter of Jerusalem. It has thus brought everything to a standstill.

Additionally, Israel commits provocative acts such as allowing Ariel Sharon to enter Al-Haram Al-Sharif, leading to an angry reaction and an uprising by the Palestinians.

The time has come for the international community to bring pressure to bear on Israel to adjust its behaviour, to act in accordance with the provisions of the Charter and to cease using its heavy weapons against unarmed Palestinian civilians, particularly children. The question of Palestine will be resolved only pursuant to international law and through the implementation of relevant Security Council resolutions, particularly resolution 242 (1967) and resolution 338 (1973).

Bahrain also believes that the international community should play a fair and just role. It is not fair to treat the two parties on an equal footing at all times. When one party strays and deviates, it should be forced to turn back to appropriate ways.

In these circumstances, for the international community to treat the Israeli and the Palestinian parties on an equal footing would only encourage the Israeli side to continue to deviate from the proper course and would thus harm the rights of the Palestinian people. This would in turn compromise international peace and stability, which ought to be based on justice.

**Mr. Sharma** (India): As we celebrate the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, the international community today underlines its support for the people of Palestine in their quest for peace and justice and for the realization of their legitimate goals and aspirations. We would like to reaffirm our solidarity with the people of Palestine and to express India's principled and continuing support for their inalienable rights.

India's cherished bonds of friendship with the Palestinian people are based on civilizational links spanning almost every aspect of human endeavour:

cultural, social, religious, economic and political. These links have been strengthened and reinvigorated with the passage of time. Since the time of Mahatma Gandhi, India's support for the Palestinian cause has been strong and unwavering. We have stood and we continue to stand side by side with the people of Palestine in their struggle to achieve their just and legitimate national rights, which is the key to peace and stability in the Middle East. India's advocacy of the Palestinian cause is manifest in our continuous and consistent support for Palestinian issues in the United Nations and other international forums.

India has consistently advocated a peaceful solution to all disputes. The road to peace is often tortuous and strewn with impediments. What is imperative is the commitment of the parties concerned to a peaceful resolution of all outstanding problems. India has closely followed developments concerning the Middle East peace process. The September 1993 signing of the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements, followed by the 1995 interim agreement on the West Bank and Gaza and by the Hebron accord of January 1997, were courageous initial steps by visionaries aiming to put an end to the saga of feuding and bloodshed and to usher in a new era of peace, stability and coexistence in the region, free of animosity and friction. Subsequently, India has welcomed other interim agreements, including the Wye River Memorandum of 1998 and the Sharm el-Sheikh agreement of 1999, which are milestones in the peace process.

The Camp David summit showed in bold relief the complexities of various issues facing the two sides. India supports continuation of dialogue between them. We hope that the final agreement reached will be mutually beneficial to both sides and will address basic requirements of the situation on a lasting basis.

As a country that has all along had a deep interest and belief in the cause of justice and peace in the Middle East, India has been convinced of the need for dialogue and peaceful negotiations to find a just, comprehensive and lasting settlement of all issues between the Israeli and Palestinian sides. We have therefore watched with very deep concern and dismay the recent incidents of violence in Jerusalem, the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and other parts of the Palestinian National Authority area and Israel. These incidents have involved deliberate acts of provocation, excessive use of force and violation of basic human rights, including the right to life.

India is encouraged by the understandings reached at the summit meeting held at Sharm el-Sheikh on 17 October. We hope that these will assist in quickly ending the cycle of violence, defusing regional tensions and preparing the way for the resumption of the peace process. We believe that implementation of these understandings in good faith will go a long way towards alleviating suffering and will create the necessary climate for achieving the goal of a just, comprehensive and durable peace in the region based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and on other relevant understandings.

There is general recognition that, together with political support for the peace process, there is a need to focus on the multifaceted tasks of nation-building. The fledgling Palestinian Authority requires generous assistance, particularly in the fields of health, education, human resources development and creation of employment. Infrastructure development is an area of critical importance. The challenges confronting the people of Palestine are also challenges for the international community, and they merit its urgent attention and support. Regional cooperation, complemented by international efforts, is a prerequisite for enhancing peace and prosperity in the region.

India will continue, within our resource constraints, to extend material and technical assistance to the people of Palestine to consolidate their progress towards self-government and nation-building. We seek to assist the Palestinian people through scholarships and exchange programmes. We offered more than 189 specialized training slots during the period 1996 to 2000, at an estimated cost of 16.4 million rupees. India also pledged $1 million each at the Washington donors conference in October 1995, at the subsequent Paris pledging conference in January 1996 and at the third donors conference, held at Washington on 30 November 1998. A portion of that amount went towards construction of a library-cum-activity centre at Palestine Technical College and a library building at Al-Azher University in Gaza. During his recent visit to Palestine on 30 June 2000, the External Affairs Minister of India, Shri Jaswant Singh, inaugurated those facilities.

While the international community must assist in realizing the cherished objective of peace and

prosperity in the region, the actual impetus for a permanent and lasting solution will have to come from the parties themselves. We trust that the wisdom and sagacity displayed, resulting in momentum towards peaceful and mutually beneficial coexistence, will continue to guide future negotiations. We trust in a successful and just outcome.

**Mr. Aboulgheit** (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): On this very date in 1947 the General Assembly adopted resolution 181 (III), which changed the course of Middle East history. It partitioned British-mandate Palestine into two States, one Arab and the other Jewish, and established a separate regime for the city of Al-Quds Al-Sharif.

Today, on the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, we recall, with the rest of the world, that the Palestinian people, despite dozens of resolutions adopted by the Security Council and the General Assembly, is still deprived of its natural right to self-determination and the establishment of its independent State on its own territory. The fact that the General Assembly considers this item annually reminds us all of the historic responsibility that the United Nations bears vis-à-vis the question of Palestine in all its aspects. This question will be solved only by reaching a just, lasting and comprehensive settlement.

The International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People comes this year at a time of serious events, with the Palestinian people facing a real crisis, and with a continuing deterioration of the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory. These bloody events reflect the Palestinian people's aggravated feelings of despair and frustration, because the peace process has been stumbling as a result of Israel's failure to respect the pledges made in the agreed accords. In addition, occupation and Israeli settlement activities continue, bringing frustration because of proposals that would lead only to a flawed and unjust settlement that ignores the resolutions of international legitimacy and the principles of the peace process, particularly in relation to Al-Quds Al-Sharif.

The international community understands more than ever that the Palestinian question represents the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict and that, without reaching a just and comprehensive settlement to this question, the Middle East, despite its strategic importance for the whole world, will continue to be a hotbed of tension and instability.

Egypt is fully confident that the international community, as represented in the General Assembly, understands that the Palestinian people needs our solidarity now more than ever before, and our support for its steadfastness in the face of excessive and unjustifiable use of military force by the Israeli military, economic siege and blockade and Israeli policies of closure and isolation, in violation of its international obligations as an occupying Power.

On 20 November 2000, Egypt recalled its Ambassador from Tel Aviv in the wake of the unacceptable, unprecedented and unjustifiable escalation of the Israeli bombardment campaign against Palestinian Government buildings and facilities in the Gaza Strip. Egypt took this measure in order to send a clear and decisive message to Israel that Egypt would not stand still in the face of such intensive and arrogant use of military force against the Palestinian people, its institutions and its property. On the other hand, Egypt has taken note of measures that Israel said it would implement during the month of Ramadan to alleviate the humanitarian situation, the siege, the closings and their detrimental impact on the economic and social condition of the Palestinian people.

Egypt looks forward to Israel's full implementation of what was agreed upon in Sharm El-Sheikh, namely, total withdrawal of all heavy weapons from areas under the Palestinian Authority and other areas in which Israel is not allowed to be present, as well as immediate cessation of the use of military force against Palestinian civilians.

No fair-minded person can ignore the detrimental effect of Israeli settlement activities on the Palestinians' status, security, national aspirations and hope to establish their independent State. Regrettably, and rather disturbingly, the Israeli Government has provided full support in words and deeds to the illegal and illegitimate position of Israeli settlers in the occupied Palestinian territories. Their provocative, aggressive and unacceptable behaviour is in contravention of all relevant United Nations resolutions and of Israel's obligations as the occupying Power, in accordance with the Fourth Geneva Convention, which prohibits the occupying Power from, among other things, transferring its civilian citizens to the lands that it occupies. Regrettably, this support that Israel provides to the settlers can be seen only as an attempt to consolidate the fait accompli, which renders meaningless and ineffective all serious negotiations

This impedes the course of negotiations and the achievement of a final status settlement by offering unacceptable options to the Palestinians.

In any case, Egypt feels that the continuation of Israeli settlement activity in the occupied Palestinian territory has a detrimental effect on the peace process as a whole. In this light, it is impossible to talk about establishing a true peace in the Middle East.

My delegation continues to repeat that East Jerusalem is an occupied territory. This is the true reality of international legitimacy, as manifested in all relevant United Nations resolutions, particularly Security Council resolutions 465 (1980) and 478 (1980), as well as General Assembly resolutions and the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention.

In the last six months, serious events have occurred, starting with the second Camp David negotiations last July and continuing with the provocative visit of the leader of the Israeli opposition party to the plaza of Al-Haram Al-Sharif. Subsequent events and violent incidents and the complete deterioration of the security situation gave rise to the total solidarity of Arab and Islamic communities with the Palestinian people in their suffering and aspirations. Those who have followed these developments have understood the great importance attached to the issue of Palestinian East Jerusalem in general and to the issue of sovereignty over Al-Haram Al-Sharif in particular. These issues must be taken into consideration in the final status negotiations on the Palestinian track. Any potential resolutions of Palestinian-Israeli issues must be adapted to take into account the central importance attached to these two issues.

The issue of Palestinian refugees — the longest-standing refugee issue in the world — can be settled on the basis of justice, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III) and subsequent resolutions, all of which give Palestinian refugees the right to return to their homes and the right to compensation if they choose not to return. Egypt wishes here to warn of the consequences of ignoring the resolutions of international legitimacy regarding this very important humanitarian issue.

The present status of the Palestinian question and the endeavours to bring about a settlement require the international community and all sincere parties, in their efforts to achieve a just and comprehensive settlement, to stand together decisively in order to realize the following main elements.

First, Israel must stop immediately all provocative measures and unjustifiable use of force in dealing with the Palestinian people. Palestinians feel tremendous frustration because of Israeli practices that have been going on now for more than 33 years of occupation.

Secondly, as soon as acts of violence cease, all the parties should implement the letter of the Sharm El-Sheikh Memorandum and understandings and make serious new efforts to bring about a settlement based on the following points that were agreed upon internationally: first, the right of Palestinians to self-determination and to the establishment of their national State on their own territory on the basis of their will and legitimate authority; secondly, total Israeli withdrawal from the occupied Palestinian territories and the dismantling of the Israeli settlements that have been erected in the middle of the Palestinian territories; thirdly, giving the fledgling Palestinian State the opportunity to participate at the international, regional and local levels without pressures or restrictions; fourthly, reaching security arrangements that can provide security and stability for both parties, without any attempts to gain privileges based on the present occupation of Palestinian territories.

Finally, we had hoped that consideration of the agenda item on the Palestinian question at this session would be the culmination of long years of General Assembly consideration of this item. Regrettably, Israel has refused and insists on prolonging the suffering of the Palestinian people and the time needed to achieve that people's national aspirations and hopes.

Despite all this, there is still hope. The Palestinian State will be established soon, and the Palestinian people will be able to realize their national dream, for which they have waited so long.

Egypt will continue to support Palestine and its people, who have so much potential, until the Palestinian people fully attain all their legitimate national rights.

**Mr. Sai** (Algeria) *(spoke in Arabic)*: I am delighted to have this opportunity to make a statement in place of Ambassador Abdallah Baali, who is unable to attend this meeting.

We again have the opportunity to discuss the question of Palestine, an issue that has been on the General Assembly's agenda since 1947. This issue has become perhaps the longest-standing issue ever to be discussed in the Assembly. The question of Palestine is almost as old as the Organization itself, and it has been a source of concern within the United Nations — in the General Assembly, the Security Council and in other United Nations bodies — since 1947.

What the Palestinian people are going through today in the occupied Arab territories touches the conscience of the entire world. As the whole world has witnessed, daily tragedies are besetting Palestinian children and people who are courageously facing the occupying Israeli forces. Since 28 September we have seen the reaction to the visit to the plaza of Al-Haram Al-Sharif by the leader of the Israeli extreme right, Mr. Sharon. Since that visit the Palestinian territories have experienced a courageous popular uprising, giving voice to the refusal of the Palestinian masses to accept occupation and loudly protesting any attack on the sacred places of Islam. Their Arab brethren have reacted as one, in full solidarity with their aspirations and rights and in protest against Israeli practices.

As the occupying Power, Israel followed a policy of brutal oppression in an effort to stamp out the intifada. In doing so, Israel used all sorts of weaponry — including tanks and helicopter gunships — against children armed only with stones to resist the occupation. As a result, over 300 persons were killed and ten thousand injured. The vast majority of those killed or injured were Palestinians, at least one third of them children.

After more than two months of confrontation, we can see from the reports of humanitarian organizations exactly how dangerous the events in Palestine are for both Palestinians and the region at large. The Palestinian people are paying too high a price, especially given the fact that the occupying Power has decided to sever all economic activities with Palestinians, thereby condemning hundreds of thousands of people to penury by depriving them of daily jobs in Israel. Israeli authorities allow their own convoys free movement and — under the benevolent eyes of the occupying army — are letting them carry out military manoeuvres on Palestinian territory.

Many resolutions have been adopted with regard to this issue. Among them is General Assembly resolution 181 (II), which states that the Palestinian people have the right to their own independent State. In addition, various relevant Security Council resolutions make it quite clear that no Power has the right to occupy any territory by force. The international community found that it was necessary to take action to end this crisis situation in order to ensure that it did not spread and to protect the Palestinian people from the attacks of the occupying forces. The Security Council decided that there was a need to end the violence in occupied Palestinian territories, and condemned the excessive use of force against the Palestinian people. This issue also found support in the Assembly at its resumed tenth emergency special session last October. The Assembly concluded that this was a matter of human rights. There was also total support in the Economic and Social Council for a draft resolution to authorize the sending of a committee of inquiry to investigate crimes committed by the Israeli army against Palestinian citizens.

Given the daily bloody events in occupied Palestine, it can be said, at the very least, that the Middle East peace process has lost all credibility, as one of the parties to the conflict has turned its back on its previous commitments. Given that state of affairs, there can be no doubt that Israel alone is responsible for the region's return to tension and violence as a result of the provocation against the conscience and religious sentiments of Palestinians and Arabs.

A strategic choice had been made to establish comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East on the basis of the principle of land for peace and the recognition of the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination — a choice reiterated during Arab and Islamic summit meetings held in Cairo and Doha last month. At those meetings, a precondition was established that any peace should be a true peace and not a peace gained at any price. There are inviolable and immutable Arab and Islamic principles at stake.

At this crucial stage in their history, the Palestinian people need more than ever before the efforts of their faithful friends and of those who long for peace. They also need support and assistance in various fields, including the political, financial and economic fields. As the overall representative of the international community, the United Nations has a particular responsibility towards the Palestinian people. This is particularly true in the light of the resolution adopted by the United Nations in 1947, which provided for the establishment of two independent States on

Palestinian territory. Fifty-three years have passed since the adoption of that resolution, and the United Nations is still being asked to allow the establishment of an independent, legitimate and national Palestinian State. That is a right no one can dispute.

We must therefore find a solution to this problematic question. The United Nations could in fact establish the necessary basis for a solution, thereby making it possible for us to make a breakthrough and settle this matter. We hear repeatedly of the rights of Palestinians to self-determination and to live in peace within an independent country. The United Nations should be advocating those rights today more than ever before, through both the General Assembly and its other bodies. In particular, the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People should be doing everything possible to further this just cause.

In the short term, the United Nations should adopt as soon as possible practical proposals to provide immediate protection for the Palestinian people against the Israeli occupation. That should be done by setting up a protection force and deploying an international observer mission under the aegis of the Organization. The United Nations should also send a fact-finding committee to the Palestinian territories in order to investigate the suffering of the Palestinian people under the occupation.

The international community has an important and essential role to play today in the Palestinian territories if we are indeed to achieve comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East, a peace that is consonant with international law and that allows the Palestinian people to exercise their right to self-determination and to establish their own independent State, with Jerusalem as its capital. That role must also be played if we are to pressure Israel to respect its international commitments, put an end to its policy of aggression, dismantle its illegal settlements on Palestinian land, and allow Palestinian refugees to return to their homes, in conformity with international humanitarian law and the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949. Israel should be forced to end its occupation of the Syrian Golan today, and to withdraw fully from southern Lebanon, in keeping with international law and Security Council resolutions, particularly resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978).

In a message of support addressed to the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, Mr. Abdelaziz Bouteflika, President of the Republic of Algeria, reiterated the full support of the Algerian nation for the Palestinian people, particularly their right to live in peace within their own territory in the context of an independent state. He called upon the international community as a whole, and in particular the two co-sponsors of the peace process and other influential actors, to shoulder their responsibilities and to do all that is necessary to achieve a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

Algeria, too, has known occupation. We, too, have suffered, and we know what it means for a people to long for independence and liberty. However great the oppression against a nation, it will continue to long for freedom. We will do everything we can to ensure that no place is lost, however many claims there are on its territory. That is why we have recognized the Palestinian state since it was declared in Algeria on 15 November 1988.

**Mr. Ould Deddach** (Mauritania) (*spoke in Arabic*): We have gathered here today to consider the question of Palestine under agenda item 41.

More than three hundred martyrs have already fallen, and thousands have been wounded, in the wake of the escalation of violence in the occupied Palestinian territories.

Reports carried by the international media since the beginning of the Palestinian intifada on the shooting of unarmed civilians, the use of artillery, helicopter gunships and rockets, and the indiscriminate destruction of property, attest to the serious and flagrant nature of these violations of the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilians in Time of War.

The Mauritanian people and Government express their full and absolute solidarity with the Palestinian people. They pay tribute to the martyrs who have fallen, not only in defence of the legitimate and sacred Palestinian rights, but also in defence of Al-Quds Al-Sharif and the rights of the Arab and Islamic nations.

The Security Council adopted resolution 1322 (2000) on 7 October 2000, which called for a cessation of all acts of violence and the establishment of a fact-finding committee to bring to justice all those

responsible for these actions. That resolution reflected the position of the international community and international public opinion. However, violence, killing and deliberate attacks against innocent Palestinians continue.

The holding of the Sharm el-Sheikh summit on 16 and 17 October last also represented a serious attempt to stabilize the situation and to return to the peace process, in implementation of resolution 1322 (2000). In this context, we would like to express our appreciation for the efforts of Egypt, the host country of that summit, and those of its President, Mr. Hosni Mubarak. We would like also to thank the Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, for all his efforts to calm the situation and to hold that summit.

That summit was followed by the Arab summit, which called for the cessation of violence and a return to the negotiating table, with a view to reviving the peace process. Despite all these international efforts and resolutions, the killing and bombing of unarmed Palestinians continued.

Today more than ever the international community is called upon to support the Security Council and international legitimacy on the question of Palestine. In this regard, we believe that the Security Council should send an observer force to protect the Palestinian people.

Mauritania, proceeding from its national principles and from the extreme importance it attaches to Arab and Islamic issues, will never change its stance. In this respect, we reiterate our support for all relevant resolutions on the sacred question of Palestine, especially Al-Quds Al-Sharif and the return of refugees.

**Mr. Rodríguez Parrilla** (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): The question of Palestine has again prompted the General Assembly to convene. Exactly two months ago, Israel began this most recent chapter in its long history of acts of aggression against the heroic people of Palestine. More than 200 unarmed civilians have died, and over 11,000 people have been wounded.

Losses to the Palestinian economy during this period, according to conservative estimates, have exceeded $1 billion. The suffering of the Palestinian families in mourning and the pain of the mothers of Palestinian children killed by Israeli violence has been incalculable.

We note with deep concern that despite the many calls for an end to the violence, Israel nonetheless is continuing to escalate its aggression, which is further diminishing the possibility of a just and lasting peace in the region. Israel has again flagrantly contravened the many relevant resolutions on the question of Palestine adopted by the General Assembly, the Security Council, the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly, and the Commission on Human Rights. Furthermore, it is flouting the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 and international humanitarian law. The international community wants to know why the United Nations cannot act to put an end to the bloodshed and the loss of human lives.

The General Assembly can and must make a decisive contribution to revitalizing the peace process in the Middle East, since the Security Council has failed to do so because of regrettable shortcomings in its functioning.

The main reason for that failure of the Security Council is a secret to no one. The double standard, the lack of democracy and transparency, the obsolete privilege of the veto and the even more insulting threat of its use are standard features of the Security Council's work. Supported by the United States, these realities led to the impunity with which Israel has acted all these years.

My delegation is honoured to be a co-sponsor again this year of the four draft resolutions introduced under agenda item 41 on the question of Palestine and feels that the updates and additions that have been made to the texts will enhance understanding of these issues. Cuba, as it has customarily done, will vote in favour of the draft resolutions and hopes that they will enjoy the traditional support of the vast majority of delegations.

The time has come to demand that Israel comply with all relevant resolutions of the General Assembly and the Security Council, in particular resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), which assuredly mark the road to peace. The time has come to call for compliance with Security Council resolution 1322 (2000), recently adopted thanks to the strenuous efforts of the caucus of non-aligned States.

The General Assembly must act decisively. More innocent people are dying with every passing minute. We must be able to adopt effective measures to reopen the path to peace, prevent continued aggression and

lead to the exercise of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. It is high time to deploy an international force to protect Palestinian civilians, in accordance with the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War.

Cuba condemns Israeli acts of aggression and reaffirms its firm and unswerving solidarity with the Palestinian people in its struggle to establish an independent and sovereign State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and for the return of all occupied Arab territories. We are convinced that only resolute action on the part of the international community can save the negotiating process and promote the achievement of a just and lasting peace in the Middle East.

**Mr. Umelo** (Nigeria): My delegation would like to thank you, Sir, for the opportunity to present our views on the question of Palestine in this meeting of the General Assembly at its fifty-fifth session. Indeed, the question of Palestine has remained one of the most intractable international problems on the agenda of the United Nations. The General Assembly has dealt with it since 1948 and efforts to find a lasting solution to the problem have yet to provide a comprehensive solution.

Permit me to recall that the General Assembly over the years has adopted several resolutions and decisions with a view to providing a solution to the crisis, but all to no avail. The 1991 Madrid Peace Conference, the 1991 Oslo accords, the 1998 Wye River Memorandum and the current initiatives of Secretary-General Kofi Annan are but a few of the various efforts at resolving this crisis. Yet, it would appear that all our efforts have come to naught as the crisis seems to have defied all solutions. This is in spite of the fact that the numerous conferences and diplomatic initiatives have provided formulas for achieving a just and lasting peace.

The Palestinian question is multifaceted, as the issues involved range from political, military, legal and humanitarian to human rights questions. However, the Israeli occupation of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, remains a knotty issue in the complex negotiations towards resolving the crisis. This is often the cause of the violence and what has now become the culture of killings that have come to mark Israeli-Palestinian relations. The latest of such orgies of violence is the current crisis, which began on 28 September 2000 over the desecration of the Al-Haram Al-Sharif and other holy places in Jerusalem, as well as in the occupied Palestinian territory. This latest crisis has claimed over 356 lives since its inception, consisting of a preponderance of Palestinians and including Israeli Jews and Arabs. My delegation believes that the need for a peaceful settlement to this conflict has never been stronger than now.

The international community, as well as the parties to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, must demonstrate the necessary political will to stop these orgies of violence and return to the negotiating table. In this regard, my delegation supports the initiatives of the Secretary-General, as stated in his report presented to the General Assembly on 20 October 2000. We commend the Secretary-General for his timely intervention in the latest crisis and his facilitation of the understanding reached at the Sharm el-Sheikh summit. In addition, we wish to commend the efforts of President Bill Clinton of the United States of America for the efforts he has deployed and continues to deploy towards finding a lasting solution to this intractable problem.

Nigeria believes in the urgent need for and value of a negotiated settlement. We therefore urge the leaders of Israel and Palestine to embrace peaceful negotiations based on Security Council resolutions 338 (1973) and 242 (1967), which we believe provide a fair and just basis for the resolution of the crisis. Furthermore, we wish to support the decisions of the emergency special session of the General Assembly on 20 October this year, which called on Israel to abide by the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 on the protection of civilian persons in time of war. It is therefore our hope that Israel will stop the use of gunboat helicopters to attack the defenceless Palestinian civilian population.

We wish in this connection to recall General Assembly resolution 54/230 of 1999 and Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) of 22 November 1967, 338 (1973) of 22 October 1973 and 425 (1978) of 19 March 1978, and to express the hope that the principle of land for peace will be concluded as envisaged in these resolutions.

Finally, my delegation wishes to reaffirm its support for the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people to self-determination and to the natural resources in the occupied territories, including Jerusalem. We therefore call on Israel not to cause the

loss or depletion of or to endanger the natural resources in the occupied Palestinian territory.

In conclusion, my delegation wishes to commend the efforts of the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, Mr. Peter Hansen, for the valuable services his organization has been rendering to alleviate the poor conditions of the Palestinian refugees, who are the real victims of this crisis. My delegation further appreciates the enormous challenge facing the leaders of Israel and Palestine in their quest for a viable and just solution to the crisis.

We would like also to underscore the great need for peace, which is so vital for the development of their society. We therefore urge both parties to seek the path of peace rather than continue to wallow in this unfortunate cycle of violence and conflict.

**Programme of work**

**The Acting President** (*spoke in Russian*): I should like to inform members that consultations are ongoing concerning the request by several countries, contained in document A/55/238, for the inclusion in the agenda of the current session of an additional item entitled "Proclamation of 31 August as the International Day of Solidarity".

*The meeting rose at 6.05 p.m.*